For Their Sakes

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/20709944.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Fandom:	僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia
Characters:	Midoriya Izuku, Bakugou Katsuki, Todoroki Shouto, Hawks (My Hero Academia), Yaoyorozu Momo, Uraraka Ochako, Shinsou Hitoshi, Iida Tenya, Kaminari Denki, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Tsukauchi Naomasa, Usagiyama Rumi | Miruko, Hakamata Tsunagu | Best Jeanist, Iida Tensei | Ingenium, Todoroki Enji | Endeavor, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Tokoyami Fumikage, Takami Keigo | Hawks, Eri (My Hero Academia), Bubaigawara Jin | Twice, Toyomitsu Taishirou | Fat Gum, Amajiki Tamaki, Dabi (My Hero Academia), Sensei | All For One
Additional Tags:	Time Travel, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Bakugou Katsuki Swears A Lot, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Quirk Discrimination (My Hero Academia), Implied/Referenced Abuse, Misunderstandings, Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Angst and Feels, Todoroki Enji | Endeavor's Bad Parenting, Protective Bakugou Katsuki, Protective Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Parental Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Protective Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Todoroki Enji | Endeavor Being An Asshole, Self-Worth Issues, Big Sister Miruko, Emotional/Psychological Abuse, references to sexual abuse, It Gets Worse Before It Gets Better, Manga Spoilers up to Chapter 253, Takami Keigo | Hawks Needs a Hug, Todoroki Shouto Needs a Hug, Everyone Needs A Hug, Psychological Trauma, Takami Keigo | Hawks-centric, Do not post to another site
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Ennea
Collections:	Behold the Sacred Texts, Reading, Bnha Bookclub Discord Recs, BNHA Books I Recommend Out Of My Heart, ⭐ Little Red's BNHA Library ⭐, Fanfiction Masterpieces, ReadOrReread, Boku no hero academia, ♡ >100k Fav Fics Bnha ♡, Amaris' Favorite Ever BNHA Fictions That She Has Read More Than You Can Count, 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs, WHAT KEEPS ME UP AT THREE AM, Keep Coming Back 2, Best of Hurt/Comfort, ⭐My Hero Stories Worth Your Time⭐, 💔My Hero Stories That Made Me Cry💔, fics better than a lot of published novels, Stalker's Amongst Stalker's, Feral's favorites, *sips tea* "I'm not gonna emotionally recover from this"
Stats:	Published: 2019-09-20 Completed: 2020-04-29 Words: 312,569 Chapters: 40/40

For Their Sakes

by SolarisLupi

Summary

Ten years in the future, Hero Society has fallen and Villains have taken over the world. The seven survivors of Class 1-A (and Shinso) scramble to save what little they have left but after one last, fatal attack, they know they've lost. Their enemy is too powerful. There is no one left to save. Their only chance for victory is in the past, so to the past they travel. Unfortunately, there are some unforeseen side-effects…

Notes

Pairings: None.
Timeline: You'll see.
Warnings: Cursing (mostly from Bakugo). Violence and blood. Angst. Panic attacks. PTSD. Character death (from the future timeline). Possible character death (from the current timeline). Spoilers for the My Hero Academia manga up to Chapter 240.
Disclaimer: I do not own My Hero Academia.

United

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Silence.

It lay thick and cold over the earth, cold and uncaring and empty, with not even a whisper of a breeze to grant twenty-six year-old Izuku Midoriya peace. He sat in ashes and dust, fingers laid limply over his knees, and stared as it coated the legs of his worn green suit gray. The silence cut deeper, creeping into his skin, and his breaths came in quick *silent* pants as he realized what had happened. He had been holding a little girl's hand. He had been telling her he was a Hero, that it was going to be alright, as fire and ash and stone rained down around them.

Now his hands held dust.

Now the air was silent.

It was hard to be a Hero when there was no one left to be a Hero for.

Midoriya's heart broke.

He curled up so his forehead pressed against the ashy ground.

And he *screamed*.

And screamed.

And screamed.

He screamed to fill the terrible silence and waited for the Villains to find him and silence him too.

Todoroki found him instead and his jaw clicked shut, his body moving as his mind remained in a fog and he grabbed his friend's arm just to be sure he was real. It was telling that Todoroki clasped his shoulder with equal intensity, his fingers colder than the ice he wielded.

Eventually, they pulled themselves together enough to move. They dragged themselves through the decay and ashes that nearly went up to Todoroki's knees. They found the other survivors, the ones Shigaraki had missed or mockingly spared.

Nine.

That was how many people were left.

Only *nine*.

Izuku Midoriya, Shoto Todoroki, Katsuki Bakugo, Momo Yaoyorozu, Hitoshi Shinso, Denki Kaminari, Ochaco Uraraka, Tenya Iida, and Eri. Eight Heroes in their mid-twenties, and one teenaged girl who never got the chance to grow up in Hero Society. As he walked through the decayed ashes of what was once a city, Midoriya wondered if Shigaraki did it on purpose. Did he leave the last eight students of UA alive just to torment them with their final failure? The city, dubbed Haven, had been the last safe place from Villains.

Had been.

There was no one left to protect anymore.

There's no one left. We lost.

The realization almost broke him.

It would have broken him, if not for one final plan.

One *final* chance.

Rewind was a powerful Quirk. A fascinating Quirk. Yet one with limits. Although her control had grown since she was a frightened little girl, Eri could not perform miracles. She could not undo the decay of Shigaraki's Quirk, or bring the ashes of Dabi's victims back to life. She had tried, over and over and over again until her cheeks were wet and her fingers bloody. Were Shigaraki's Decay and Dabi's Cremation counters to her Quirk, or was some damage beyond even her abilities to Rewind?

As he stumbled after the others to their last bunker-like safe house— not safe *nowhere* was safe they were starving mice being hunted by cats—Midoriya supposed it did not matter.

Nothing matt—

No, it *did*. It ~~*had to*~~— *did* matter. Because maybe there *was* another way to save them. All Might, Mirio, Tamajiki, Eraserhead, Present Mic, Nighteye, Midnight, Best Jeanist, Mount Lady, Kamui Woods, Edgeshot, Hawks, Miruko… *Everyone* who had died.

It was Eri who came up with the idea, inspired by an old superhero movie that somehow survived the Villains' apocalypse. It was Kaminari who volunteered to test it. Midoriya did not know exactly how or why. All he knew is that the day after they came up with the tentative— *desperate*— plan, Kaminari woke him up in their final bunker and told him it worked with a beaming grin on his face.

They tested it a few more times, again and again, until one day they all woke together.

"So it's decided then." Midoriya stated. "We'll go back to before we entered our second internships."

Uraraka tensed and glanced at Iida. "Deku—"

"It's alright, Ochaco." Iida interrupted quietly, a far cry from the loud stern student he had once been. "I know we have to arrive after the Kamino Incident, after Hawks is given the

mission to infiltrate the League." *After my brother was paralyzed,* went unsaid.

"But surely it would be better to arrive before that?" Kaminari blurted. He dragged his hand through his hair, visibly distressed. "I mean, we'd still have All Might with us."

"Haven't you learned *anything* from the past decade?" Bakugo snapped. He leaned against the wall, arms crossed and fingers clenched tightly so they dug into his biceps. "We *can't* rely on All Might to solve all our problems. That's what got society into this mess in the first place!"

Kaminari winced.

"I agree with Kacchan." Midoriya said. His voice was steady, but they could all hear the tinge of pain under his level tone. "All Might is on borrowed time. He has been ever since he fought All for One. He was down to three hours of power before giving me One for All. After, his time limit dropped. We can't rely on his power to save everyone. We need information, on the League of Villains and the Meta Liberation Army. We have to take them both out *completely*, or Hero Society will crumble again."

"So we're going to let Hawks walk into the killer wasp's nests again?" Uraraka asked quietly. "That's how he *died* last time, remember?"

Midoriya grimaced. Of course he remembered. How could he ever forget? Although it had been nearly ten years, he could remember the Winged Hero's death clearly. Outed as a spy working for the Hero Commission, the Paranormal Liberation Front had let the world know they were not to be trifled with by broadcasting his torture on television. Yet even while at their mercy, Hawks got in one last strike against the PLA by using hand signals to warn the Heroes about an upcoming attack. It was only because of that warning that Hero Society was not completely wiped out in a day.

When he realized what had happened and that Hawks cost him total victory, Shigaraki had wasted no time and disintegrated him on the spot.

Midoriya shoved the memories out of his mind and met Uraraka's gaze. "We don't have much of a choice. Last time, all the information Hawks had died with him. Lab locations, PLA members' identities, their assets, businesses backing them, dirty cops, Heroes, and corrupt politicians under their thumb… All things we need to know in order to stop the Villains before they outnumber us. We need someone to infiltrate them, and Hawks lasted longest."

It was the truth. All following attempts to infiltrate the PLA had failed miserably. The longest any Hero-turned-spy lasted was a month, and that was only because their spy had been brainwashed and they had no idea until he assassinated Red Riot. Midoriya felt a twinge of pain at the thought of his friend and forced himself not to look at Bakugo. He knew what expression he would see there. It was why Midoriya could not ask Bakugo to try to infiltrate the League when they tried to recruit him. It was why he could not ask *any* of his friends to make that sacrifice.

Uraraka hesitated and placed a cautious hand on Midoriya's shoulder. "That's… a bit cold, Izuku."

Midoriya knew it. He *despised* it. But ten years of losing had hardened him. He wanted to be a shining Hero, a Symbol of Peace like All Might. But he couldn't be. How could he be when Peace was a thing of the past?

Which is why we're going to the past, where peace is possible, he thought, and his heavy heart felt just a bit lighter. "We have to do this."

Perhaps she saw something in his face or heard it in his voice, but Uraraka let her hand drop and looked away.

"Are you going to come with us, Eri?" Shinso asked.

Eri flinched. "I can't."

They did not pressure her further. Midoriya knew what situation she would appear in if this worked. He could not ask her to go back to Overhaul any more than he could ask his friends to infiltrate the League. They were going to try to save the future and themselves, not destroy them.

"You should appear in your younger selves' bodies." Eri continued briskly, as if the previous topic had never been brought up.

"*Should?*" Yaoyorozu echoed warily.

Eri shrugged helplessly. "I haven't exactly done this over such a long distance— er, time?— before."

"There are so many ways this could go wrong." Todoroki said lowly.

Midoriya's gaze unwittingly followed the burn scars on his face, his scar from boiling water nearly lost among the red. "Well, the worst case scenario is we all die and this is all for nothing."

Bakugo jabbed him none-too-gently in the side. "Like we're going to let ourselves die for nothing, Deku."

Midoriya felt himself relax as he gently shoved Bakugo back. "If anyone's going to survive it's you."

Bakugo scoffed. His hand drifted towards the empty space beneath his left shoulder. "Don't sell yourself short, nerd."

Midoriya's guts twisted and he did not respond. "Remember, our priority is to take down the PLA before it can form." he said instead.

"While saving people." Uraraka added.

Midoriya nodded sharply. “While saving as many as we can.”

“Great plan. How do we do it?” Shinso asked sarcastically.

Midoriya hesitated. “The PLA will find us soon. We don’t have time to plan things out here. But we should try to warn All Might and the Heroes. From there, maybe we get intel from Hawks so we can find their bases and shut them down.We’ll figure the details out before we get to that point.”

“They’re not going to believe we come from the future.” Yaoyorozu predicted. Her gaze darkened and she rubbed her left shoulder, hand brushing the scars there. “They’re more likely to think we’re spies who have replaced our originals.”

“Then we’ll have to convince them.” Midoriya stated, more optimistically than he felt. “Eri?”

She took a breath and held out her right hand. “I’m ready.”

The eight crowded into a circle, reached out, and grasped her outstretched hand. Uraraka giggled, muffling it with her other palm, and the unexpected sound brought a twitch of a smile to Midoriya’s face as well.

“What’s so funny?” Kaminari asked.

“We look like a sport’s team about to go out into a match.” Uraraka muttered.

Midoriya looked at their joined hands. “Well, we are a team.” He looked up, holding each of their gazes for a moment. “No matter what happens next, we’ll have each other’s backs. We’ll face the future— the past, as we always have. Together.”

“Together.” Bakugo echoed.

“Together.” Shinso affirmed.

“Together.” Todoroki whispered.

The ground rumbled. The bunker shuddered. Metal creaked and snapped as dirt trickled onto Midoriya’s face. Eri’s pale skin turned a sickly white, but her hand did not shake.

“They’re here.” Eri said calmly. Her red eyes filled with tears. “It’s time for you to go.”

Before Midoriya could protest, he felt a jerk in his chest, like something had taken hold of his soul and yanked it. White light burned their retinas, as the world around them shuddered and turned black.

The last they saw of Eri was the girl crumbling to dust.

XXXXXXX

Hawks, the Winged Hero and Number Three Hero in Japan, was not one to complain. Sure, he would rather have less to do than more, and sure, his goal in life was to give Pro Heroes

some time to spare, but when duty called he answered willingly and jumped into action with a smile.

Since he was such a good sport about it, he let himself groan a little as he weaved over thick green treetops as rain pelted him from the heavens.

Despite being a bird, forests were not really Hawks' thing. Well, they were in the sense that he loved walking beneath the trees and breathing in the fresh, earth-scented air, but for battle? Not really. Villains liked to hide behind the trees, though it was more annoying than disadvantageous. Playing hide and seek with Villains was time-consuming, and he had better things to do back in town. Like help little old ladies carry their bags and save cats from trees and maybe stop by that new food place if he had the time before it closed for the day.

As he glanced at the sky and noticed it was almost night, he acknowledged that at this rate, he would not have the time.

As usual.

The rain was just making it worse. His wings, coat, pants, and *everything* were soaked. If he tipped his head he bet water would come pouring out of his ear— and that was *not* an airhead joke, Rumi. It was Miruko's fault he was in the rain chasing after a Villain in the first place. She just *had* to kick a truck at him and make him dodge when he almost snagged the guy. Yes, she hated working with others and told him many times, but they were *friends*. Friends don't kick trucks at friends, no matter how unhappy they were to be working with them.

Hawks grumbled and flew low over the trees, sharp gaze piercing the foliage as he searched for his prey. Normally he would send out more than a few feathers to scout out the area, but unfortunately the Heroes had no idea what this Villain's Quirk was. It would be just his luck that the Quirk allowed him to control people if he snagged something off of them, like a feather. Consider Hawks paranoid but lessons about caution had been beaten into his head from an early age. Better to be safe than sorry when handling unknowns.

His headphones crackled slightly and the voice of the source of his suffering came through. *"Hey, Baby Bird. I'm done here. Got the runner yet?"*

"No." Hawks grunted, and excuse him for being a bit miffed when his wings were soaked. "And *don't* call me 'Baby Bird'. You lost that right when you betrayed me."

"*Ooo, you **are** grumpy today."* Miruko noted. *"Is it because of the truck that almost hit you?"*

"The truck you *kicked at my face.*" Hawks corrected.

"*I was aiming for the Villain."*

"I was *next* to the Villain. About to arrest him. Until *someone* decided to kick a truck at my face."

"*I was testing your dodging skills."*

Hawks' eye twitched. "More like you forgot you were working with someone, *again*. This is why your nickname privileges have been revoked."

"*I reject your revocation."* Miruko said loftily. *"I will always call you baby bird. Because that's what you are. Adorable. And tiny. Like a fluffy little baby bird."*

"Haha." Hawks sighed, but could feel a smile pulling at his lips. "I'm twenty-one and taller than you, you know."

"*Doesn't matter."* Miruko's teasing tone faded. *"Any luck yet?"*

Hawks scanned the sea of drenched green below him and shook his head. "No. Got a Quirk for me?"

"*The police pulled an image of the guy's face from the security feed but we haven't got an ID or Quirk yet. Be careful."*

"Always am." Hawks said lightly.

"*Liar."* Miruko muttered.

Hawks pouted despite her being unable to see it. "Mean." He let his smile drop and scoured the treetops one last time. "I'm heading down. The Villain's here somewhere."

He slipped through the treetops and landed on the muddy soil below. It was not much drier under the trees than on top of them, but Hawks could successfully shake off some of the water that had gathered in his wings. His sharp golden eyes pierced the gloomy underbelly of the forest, watchful for any movement.

"I'm sending out feathers." He murmured. "If I get controlled or possessed, I'm blaming you."

"*Noted."* Miruko said, and he could hear the grin in her voice. *"Show them your talons, Baby Bird."*

Hawks would keep the banter going but he honestly wanted to just get home and dry off at this point. He stepped carefully through the trees, mindful of any mud he could slide in. He felt the vibrations through his feathers but none alerted him to a human presence. Still, he continued his search as the sun slowly slipped beneath the horizon, plunging the forest into darker shadows.

The crackle of his headphones alerted him and he put a hand to his ear. "What have you got?"

Miruko cleared her throat. *"Sooooo the guy has a Quirk that lets him sorta jump back to a place he had previously been… Like some sort of flash-step thing."*

Hawks stopped in place and put his head in his hands with a groan. Rainwater dripped down over his fingertips. "He appeared back in town, didn't he?"

"*Yes."*

“And you’ve arrested him.”

“*Uh huh.”*

“So I’ve been out here walking in the mud and rain for *hours* for no reason.”

“*Yep.”* Miruko said, popping the ‘p’.

Hawks whined into his hands and dragged them down his face. “You owe me buckets of chicken. *Buckets*. Actually, scratch that. You owe me a *feast*.”

“*I don’t owe you anything.”* Miruko huffed. *“You’re the one who messed up and missed him with your hawk-like eyes of yours.”*

Hawks winced.

“*I didn’t mean it like that.”* Miruko amended quickly. *“Look, we got him and no harm was done—”*

“Rumi,” Hawks interjected. “It’s fine. You don’t have to worry. I’m not a perfectionist terrified of failure anymore.”

“*You’re not a **teen** terrified of **what would happen** if you failed anymore, you mean.”* Miruko muttered.

Hawks hummed vaguely and squinted at the dreary black sky.

“*Get yourself home and dry off, Baby Bird.”* Miruko lectured. *“Can’t have you catching a cold.”*

“You’re still worrying.” Hawks said lightly.

“*Well, **someone** has to.”* Miruko huffed. *“Now get moving before I come over there and kick you back home.”*

Hawks laughed, then spluttered as rain water ran into his mouth. “I hate rain. *So much.*” he hissed once he stopped coughing.

“*Then get out of it, dumb Baby Bird.”*

“Yeah, yeah.”

Hawks stretched out his wings and shook them in a futile attempt to dry them off a bit. He could fly, but it was going to be a rough journey. This was why he tended to swim with most of his feathers detached. Before Hawks could lift off, a shiver went down his spine. The chill spread into his chest, icy and cold, and his heart beat faster than a hummingbird’s wings.

“*Hawks? I heard your breathing speed up. What do you see?”* Miruko questioned urgently.

Hawks hesitated, unable to explain the cold feeling of dread he felt. He scanned the area warily as his wings flicked up in preparation to fight or take flight. “Something’s—”

Thwoom.

White light flashed, the trees around him shattered, and Hawks’ head split in two. For a moment he thought he had somehow been struck by lightning, but then pain tore through him from head to foot to wingtip. Red-hot claws sank into his skull, ripping his brain apart and he might have screamed. He distantly felt his body hit the dirt, but the dull ache from the collision was dwarfed by the fire in his skull. Another scream caught in his throat, choking him with its intensity, but boiling lava blocked his airways, spreading out over his whole body and leaving him writhing in pain.

Someone else was screaming. Many someones, in fact. Instincts drilled into him by years of training pushed back the pain for a moment and he struggled to rise, to find those tortured souls and help them. Instead a barrage of voices stabbed through his mind like knives, screams overlapping in a chorus of terror.

“*WHERE THE FUCK ARE WE?!”*

“*I can’t feel my body.”*

“*Oh my God.”*

“*Can’t breathe. Can’t breathe. Can’tbreathecan’tbreathecan’t—”*

“*What happened?”*

“*Why can’t I feel my body?!”*

“*Deku? Deku, where are you?”*

“*What’s going on?”*

“*Oh no. The transfer—”*

Hawks tried to get to his feet and his red wings fluttered weakly. Panic tore through him like a lance.

“*Are those wings?!”*

“*We’re a Nomu. We’re a **Nomu**.”*

“*Were we captured?”*

“*Nonononono **please** not like—”*

Tears gathered in Hawks’ eyes, from the terror or pain he could not say. His hands twitched towards his face— He just had to reach his communicator in his headphones *he just had to reach*— but it was like his limbs could not listen to his commands. Instead they quivered in

front of his eyes, fingers twitching spasmodically. The voices overlapped, becoming a cacophony of disjointed words and noise worse than nails on a chalkboard and a demon's screams. Hawks' body jerked and he felt something warm trickle down over his upper lip.

"*Hands? Human hands?"*

"*Not a Nomu… Please not a Nomu..."*

"*—whose—?"*

"*Boy's hands?"*

"*Where's my—?"*

"*Too much noise. Can't think. Give me a—"*

"*What is this?!"*

"*I'm so cold."*

"*Weightless we're weightless."*

"*I can't feel my limbs—"*

"*Shut up! All of you shut up!"*

"*Stop it stop it STOP!* ***IT HURTS!****"*

The voices went silent for a wonderfully painless second, and Hawks belatedly realized the last one screaming had been him. In the silence, Hawks heard yet another voice, one he slowly recognized as Rumi's.

"***—don't care if he's asleep!*** *Get someone to Hawks' location* ***right now****. He's* ***screaming****—"* There was a pause as Miruko realized Hawks was silent. He had been screaming...? *"Hawks? Hawks, can you hear me? Hawks! Answer me, dammit!"*

Hawks' lips might have moved, but he could not find the breath to respond.

In his head, eight voices spoke as one, overlapped, ominous, and echoing as they were united in terror and pain.

"***Hawks?****"*

Hawks' vision wavered and everything faded into darkness.

XXXXXXX

Miruko prowled back and forth, more like a caged panther than the rabbit her Quirk was styled after. If she were Endeavor the tile beneath her feet would be blackened and smoking. As it was, a few cracks appeared in the flooring where her feet struck the ground. She glanced at the clock on the wall and her ears went flat, flicking back.

"Screw orders." she growled and stalked towards the door. She yanked it open and scowled. "Move."

"Hello to you as well." Best Jeanist said mildly. "Also, no. You need to rest. Doctor's orders. You've already collapsed twice—"

"I'll rest when Hawks is found." Miruko snapped. "I have to keep looking."

When Hawks vanished, the Pro Heroes were in a bit of a panic, with rescue and tracking teams sent out to search for the missing Hero. 'A bit of a panic' became full-blown alarm as the weeks went by without a single red feather being found. A Hero— even one as flighty as Hawks— did not simply disappear without a trace. *Something* went wrong and no one had the slightest clue as to what. The Villain that Hawks was chasing was no help either because he didn't know which way he ran. He also was not part of some scheme to capture Hawks. The police made sure of that when they questioned the guy.

The disappearance of a Pro Hero— especially one as high-ranked and popular as Hawks— could only be the precursor to something big. Miruko knew it, Jeanist knew it, hell, even All Might knew it if his strained smile when questioned about the incident was any indication. Yet as time went by, it seemed like everyone was giving up on finding Hawks. So excuse Miruko for being a little short with Best Jeanist, even though he was one of the few who seemed to think Hawks was still out there.

"It's been *months*." she reminded him. "How haven't we found him yet?"

Jeanist sighed with the weariness of someone who had already had this conversation. "Something fried the tracker in his costume—"

"I *know* that!" Miruko snapped. "That's not what I'm asking."

"Then what are you asking?" Jeanist asked mildly.

That extinguished Miruko's fire and she slumped in a chair. "I don't know. *I just don't know what else to do.*"

The admission hurt to voice and she loathed herself for saying it, because admitting there was no new lead felt like she was giving up on Hawks too. The other members of the team put together to find him had already drifted onto different missions, with the exception of her, Jeanist, and those from Hawks' agency. Mockingjay was doing a good enough job keeping the agency— jokingly nicknamed "the Kettle" by its occupants— running, but as a mostly Underground Hero, she was never one for the spotlight. That left the publicity on Miruko's shoulders since there was no way in hell she was letting Hawks' agency fall under while he was gone.

"Rumi..." Miruko stiffened at the use of her civilian name. Jeanist noticed her tense posture but kept speaking. "Hawks went missing in early April of last year. The Sport's Festival is in a couple weeks. It hasn't been months; it's been *more than a year.* You've been running yourself into the ground trying to find Hawks, and keep your and his agencies up and running. You went up in the rankings, from seventh to fifth, because you've been doing so

much, but I don't think that's healthy. Hawks wouldn't want you to go on like this." Dark eyes studied her knowingly and she spotted a hint of a wistful smile peek from behind his high collar. "You know how he is about relaxing. Maybe you should take some time off to get your head together."

"What part of "*I'm not resting*" do you not understand?" Miruko said with less fire than she intended. Her ears quivered and she slumped. "Hawks is missing because *I screwed up*. I spent our last conversation teasing him instead of asking what forest he was in, or how far away he was from the city, or *anything useful* we could use to locate him. I broke one of the golden rules of working with a team and didn't keep track of my teammate. So I *lost* him."

"You shouldn't blame—"

"*Don't.*"

Jeanist seemed to understand Miruko did not want to hear it so he wisely didn't. Instead he sat across from her, perching on the edge of the chair with his legs crossed. "We've questioned suspects. We've searched nearby forests as best we could. We've put up missing posters with rewards for information. We've sent out our best trackers. *All Might himself* went looking." Jeanist hesitated, then put a hand on her shoulder. "Miruko, I'm sorry. But I don't think there's more we can do."

"You're asking me to give up on finding my best friend." Miruko stated coolly.

Jeanist had the decency to wince. "I'm asking you to take a breather. Just for a couple weeks. Stay at home, sleep, eat, watch the Festival that's coming up—"

"My best friend is missing and you want me to watch the Sports Festival?" Miruko asked flatly.

"You *need a break*." Jeanist enunciated. His posture shifted, growing stern, and Miruko was reminded she was speaking with the Number Four Ranked Hero. "Don't make me order you."

But how long will he be Number Four with Hawks missing? The only reason Hawks is still Number Three is because he's so popular and his agency… Miruko shoved those thoughts far, far away into the back of her mind.

"You can *try* to order me." she said mutinously.

"Or I'll watch the Festival with you to make sure you stay put." Jeanist retorted mildly.

Miruko's scowl faded away and she sighed. "This is why I hate working with people."

"And here I thought you'd be used to it by now." Jeanist said. He rose from his seat. "I'll be back the day the Festival starts. And if those bags I see under your eyes are still there by then, I will be severely disappointed."

"Oh no. Not disappointed." Miruko intoned dully. She remained in her seat and flapped a hand. "Go. Find someone else to mother hen."

Jeanist chuckled but obediently headed towards the door. He paused just inside the door frame, one hand laid lightly on the knob. “I’m not giving up on Hawks, Rumi. None of us are. We’ll find him.”

He left before Miruko could reply. She stared at the closed door for a few minutes and slouched in her chair, dragging her hands over her tired eyes. Her red eyes unwillingly drifted to a picture on the wall. Her and Hawks’ grinning faces looked back at her, his fingers poised in a peace sign while hers gave him his own set of bunny ears. The picture had been taken only a few years ago when Hawks was nineteen, but to Miruko it felt like a different lifetime.

“You’re going to get an earful when we find you, Hawks.” she whispered. “For making me worry like this...”

Chapter End Notes

Full Summary: Ten years in the future, Hero Society has fallen and Villains have taken over the world. The seven survivors of Class 1-A (and Shinso) scramble to save what little they have left but after one last, fatal attack, they know they’ve lost. Their enemy is too powerful. There is no one left to save. Their only chance for victory is in the past, so to the past they travel. Unfortunately, there are some unforeseen side-effects...

Namely that they’re all stuck in Hawks’ head. At least they’ll have the help of the current Number Three Pro Hero… once they figure out how to function like this and convince everyone Hawks hasn’t lost his mind.

XXXXXXX

A/N: I should be working on my WIPs but I have so much Writer’s Block on them I could build a city. I’ve also learned that if I go “No, I can’t write new ideas because I have old ones to finish.” I’ll get nothing done. So here I am with another time travel story. This one spawned from a dream of mine. I’ll get into the details of that later.

Just so you know, this will likely not implement anything from after chapter 240 since I’ve wrote a significant chunk of this fic before that came out (I went back and added the PLF in as the name of the villain group but that’s about it for changes.) For further reference, I started planning/writing this before chapter 230. So yeah, most stuff from after that will not affect this story.

And before you ask any “Will you write *insert ship here*?” questions, the answer is always “No.” I don’t write romance, and whenever I try to intentionally write romantic pairings it’s horrible. So expect friendships and family-ness abound.

Lost (And Found)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hawks had never been a crier. Even when he was a child, he rarely gave more than a sniffle, preferring to internalize his tears rather than show them and face ridicule. It was not a natural instinct, but how he was raised since crying children were too loud for an alcoholic parent to ignore.

Nowadays tears of pain pricked at his eyes as constantly as he breathed, never falling but always present as he struggled to function through a never-ending nightmare. In whatever forest he was in— he'd forgotten its name long ago— he only had two companions. Or three. Or five. Or more. If he put them into two groups for the sake of his sanity, they were pain and the voices, however many there were.

Hawks did not need an outsider's perspective to know his head was a mess. The constant migraines were one obvious indicator and the agonizing well of voices another, more pressing one. After the shout of his name, the voices degraded from semi-coherent words into a stream of… something. Hawks was not sure *what* to call it. Not thoughts, gibberish, or even streams of consciousness. Just a garbled, chaotic mess of… instincts?

Whatever they were, they trapped him in a painful cycle he could not escape from.

Run. Hide. Survive. Run. Hide. Survive. ~~*Run-hide-survive.*~~

Hawks was being hunted. He did not know who hunted him or why, but he knew *something* malicious followed him. He could feel its presence behind him patient and malevolent as it leaned over him with open jaws, but every time he looked nothing was there. Still, the panic remained, and he ran and hid from his invisible enemy. The voices might have tried to explain things to him a few times, but he could not hear them among the surge of *pain-fear-wrong-can'tbreathe-**hide***.

Hawks could function just enough to survive in the wilderness— at least the Commission's training was good for something— but the stress had taken its toll. His bright red plumage had dulled to a sickly red-tinged grey, and feathers tended to fall out of his wings with little provocation. The instinct to *hide-hide-hide* forced him to obsessively pick up every single one he dropped, leaving him with fistfuls of feathers. Sometimes he would hold them for hours, clutching them between white-knuckled fingers as he prepared to defend himself from enemies that never appeared. Other times he'd blink and they'd be gone. He could never remember how, where, or when he got rid of them.

At times the stress would be too much and he'd yank out more feathers with his fingers, falling back on bird-like instincts he never knew he had. The voices tried to stop him— or at least some of them did while one or two or three sneered at him for his weakness— but their protests pounded through his brain like sledgehammers and made the anxiety worse. It was

like he felt the terror of nine people instead of one, and it was a miracle he had not collapsed or suffered a heart attack yet.

Every time Hawks thought he might grasp the slightest bit of control, the voices would well up and tear it from his hands, leaving him floundering in painful confusion. Whenever he thought about returning to civilization, the barrage of emotions would leave him curled up and shuddering at the base of a tree— *can't go back like this can't can't can't*— as he wished he were dead. A few of the voices would *berate-or-try-to-comfort-or-feel-guilty-for* him for that, but it was *too much*. Hawks could not understand them. He could not tell what they wanted. He could only stumble through each day without a plan or purpose, breathing and heart beating, but feeling less alive than a ghost.

Grimy, goalless, and lost, he had never felt less human before, not even compared to when the Commission isolated, caged, and studied him like a stray animal they wanted to train. The good news was that the voices could not seem to control his body. He had blacked out from the migraines and the pain brought by their shouts, but he always woke where he had fallen. It did not lessen his paranoia any when he swore he heard the voices mention they had tried. They *had* tried to control him, but failed.

Hawks was too exhausted to be thankful for small mercies. Instead he focused on his instincts: *Run. Hide. Survive.*

Until one day, without warning, the mantra changed. He'd had been staring at the lush foliage of the treetops in a dazed stupor, noting the signs of spring, when the barrage of conflicting emotions twisted into words once more.

Go to Hosu.

Go to Hosu.

Oi, featherbrain! Listen to us! Go to Hosu.

You have to go to Hosu.

Go to Hosu, please.

Go to Hosu. Save him.

[illegible]

It was terrifying to have voices in his head telling him to do things. They had never united like this since they first shouted his name. Whatever they were, they *never* spoke as one, instead acting like people talking over each other, each vying for his attention with ever-louder shouts. Not this time. Not for… *this*.

Some of the voices were soft and almost apologetic, but others were forceful, *demanding* he take action or there would be consequences.

Not for the first time, Hawks wondered how he had been possessed. The voices seemed to hear his thoughts and shouted louder in protest, becoming an indescribable meld of noises and screams once more. Hawks put his hands over his ears— he had lost his headphones long ago but did not remember when— even though he knew it would not block them out.

"*Stop*." he whispered, voice raspy and hoarse from disuse.

Perhaps it was the broken desperation in his tone, but the voices finally went silent. Honestly, he was surprised they even heard him with the racket they made.

Hawks swallowed. "Talk. One at a time. *Please*." He could hardly string a sentence together as his skull threatened to crack in four.

The silence remained. For a breathless—disassociative— moment, Hawks tricked himself into believing he might have imagined the voices. For a moment, he hoped that his days of overwhelmed and mindless wandering were only a terrible dream.

Then whispers started up, too soft for him to hear, and he realized the voices were *talking to each other*. He swallowed his panic— *repress repress repress*— because he could not bear for his fear to overwhelm them all when he had just been able to speak for the first time in months. The silence returned, and for the first time in too long it was quiet enough that Hawks could hear his rapid heartbeat.

"*Hello, Hawks."* a single, female voice said.

Hawks *might* have had a panic attack. He was pretty sure it was a panic attack, because when he could see again he was still by the same tree and still curled up against its base, but it was night time. His head felt like someone had taken an axe to it, and his skin was burning and sweaty even though he felt cold.

Hawks shivered and pulled his ruined jacket tightly around himself, covering up as much skin as possible with the grimy, ripped cloth. He could barely look at his own body without feeling too many eyes studying him, taking in every inch of his skin like they wanted to dissect him and see what lay underneath.

Pressure built inside his skull but nothing came from it, giving him the distinct impression of several someone's wanting to speak but forcibly holding their tongues. It took a few more attempts— as pressure built and Hawks' skull felt like it was going to burst— but the voices managed to keep quiet long enough for the female one to speak alone.

"*I apologize for frightening you."* she said eventually.

Hawks stayed stock still, terrified of doing anything and breaking the tentative calm inside his head.

The female voice cleared her throat awkwardly— did she have a throat to clear? *"Um, I know your throat hurts. You do not need to speak out loud since we can hear your thoughts."*

Hawks wheezed out a hysterical, hoarse giggle. He stifled it with his hand because he needed to be quiet because he was being *hunted*—

The female voice winced. *"You are not being hunted. We are. Er,* ***were****."*

That did not make Hawks feel better. In fact, a cold stone of dread settled in his chest as his mind went to all the different possibilities. Had a bunch of on-the-run Villains transported themselves into his head or something? Apparently he managed to keep the thought to himself— or his rampant emotions covered it up— because his… *occupants* did not respond to it.

What do you ***want*** *from me?*

The question Hawks had wanted to ask for so long tore itself from his mind, observed and devoured by the horde. They did not berate him for his weakness, though he could sense some wanted to, the distinct feeling of disgust prodding at his mind like slimy water.

"*Nothing. This was all a mistake."* The voice sounded as distressed as Hawks felt. *"Oh, Hawks, I'm so sorry! We didn't ask for this either."*

Hearing that glimmer of humanity— so different from the voices' *demands he listen or*— Hawks's breathing evened out. *Are you okay?*

The voice gave a startled laugh. *"You're the one in pain but you're asking me if I'm okay?"*

I'm a Hero. I help others first, Hawks thought, and didn't that feel like the only stable truth he had left?

Her chuckle was a bit too hollow. *"We know. We know who you were."* Panic stabbed through Hawks like a blade. *"I-I mean,* ***are****—"*

"*Calm down.*" a deeper, male voice ordered shortly.

Both Hawks and the female voice jumped.

"*R-Right."* the female voice stammered. Hawks heard a sound like someone taking a deep breath. *"He's right. I can't panic. Sorry. It's hard to stay focused. Our emotions keep swirling together and infecting each other. It's like a plague. Or a whirlpool. You've been stuck in it too. So you know it's hard to keep a clear head."*

How did this happen? Hawks thought, not expecting an answer.

Guilt, anger, frustration, and sorrow jabbed at his mind and he shied away from them. Through the storm of emotions, he got the distinct impression the female presence was grimacing. *"We… We'll explain things once we figure that out."*

Or you could just ***try*** *to explain now*, Hawks thought, desperate for any type of clarification on *what the hell was going on.*

The following silence was not a relief. In fact, it was probably the most uncomfortable thing he had ever experienced. He could feel them repressing themselves, stamping on their own thoughts as they chanted a maddening mantra of *don't think don't think don't think*.

Or maybe you could introduce yourselves, Hawks amended miserably.

He should be more concerned that he was conversing with a voice in his head but he had long ago concluded that these voices were not some type of split personality. Running around in the woods in a panic that was not his own taught him a few things.

"*You may call me 'Red'."* the female voice said eventually.

"*WHO THE HELL GAVE YOU THE RIGHT—!"*

The voices hushed the loud, angry one before Hawks could to more than wince.

"*Sorry."* Red apologized again. *"B— Ummm, Orange. Yeah, he'll be Orange. Orange has a bit of a temper."*

"*I'LL SHOW YOU MY FUCKING TEMPER—"*

Hawks curled up and pressed his hands to his temples.

"*Stop it! You're hurting him!"* a different female voice shouted, nowhere nearly as loud as the other.

The angry voice went quiet as he felt a twinge of guilt but denied he was guilty and was angry that the other could feel his guilt— Hawks could *feel* the other voices biting their tongues, the pressure from their unspoken complaints like claws around his throat.

"*Okay. Okay. Focus."* Red took another breath. *"I'm not the greatest at this. One of us— er, let's call him 'Green'— is better at calming people but he tends to mumble and ramble to himself."*

"*Sorry."* a male voice— Green?— mumbled. *"I'm just trying to figure out how this happened. This is unprecedented! Well, not* ***unprecedented*** *considering One— Er, things. You know what I mean. I mean,* ***you*** *don't Hawks, but they do. We do? Calmdownfocuscalm breathe. Breathing. Can I brea— **Focus**. There are so many factors to consider, like the timeframe and the circumstances surrounding our exit and—"*

"*Shhhhhhhh."* Other voices hissed as one and Green went quiet.

How many of you are there? Hawks thought shakily.

"*Eight."* Red said reluctantly. *"Do you… want to meet us?"*

Hawks felt them now. Eight distinct… presences? Auras? Eight distinct *somethings* in his mind. A shudder passed through him but he breathed through his nose, replying even as he braced himself for more pain. *Sure.*

“*Well, you know Green and Orange.”* Red began.

“*Hello, Hawks.”* Green greeted. *“It’s nice to meet you. I wish it was under better circumstances like we planned but we didn’t expect—”*

“*Shut up!”* Orange snapped and Hawks flinched. Orange’s annoyance stabbed at his mind but he unexpectedly drew back as he realized anger would solve nothing while also realizing the others could feel he had realized his anger would solve nothing ~~and he slowly grew angrier at the lack of privacy—~~

Wasn’t it just night time a second ago? Hawks tried not to think about it.

“*Who’s next?”* Red asked quickly. *“Be careful not to swarm him—”*

The voices pressed against Hawks’ mind and he bit his lip hard enough to draw blood. They retreated just as hastily and the pain went from ‘white-hot knives in his brain’ to ‘red-hot needles in his brain’.

“*We’re trying.”* the deep voice from before said. *“I shall be White.”*

“*...Purple.”* another deep voice said briefly.

“*Oh, I’ll be Pink!”* a bubbly, female voice said. *“Wait, I shouldn’t because...”* Her cheerful tone faded and Hawks heart ached with grief that was not his own. *“Oh. Um. Pink’s fine. It’s… not being used.”*

“*I’m Yellow, obviously.”* a male voice said with some bravado. ‘Bravado’ because Hawks could feel his nerves because he— they— were all aware that if one of them freaked out the rest would freak out and they’d be lost in panic again and they’d never escape—

“*Ah, I see the point of these color-based codenames. I shall use the codename ‘Silver’.”* yet another male voice declared. Hawks recognized him as one of the louder ones and grimaced. ‘Silver’ noticed and lowered his volume. *“Hello, Number Tw— er, Three Hero Hawks! It is an honor to meet you*.”

Can’t you just tell me your names? Hawks asked.

He would like to delude himself into thinking he sounded whiny but knew he sounded pleading instead, because he just wanted this to be *over*. His head still wanted to split apart and the urge to cry, scream, or most likely do both choked him again. He focused on his breathing and the feeling of the tree bark under his fingers.

“*Sorry.”* Red apologized again. *“We can’t yet. It’s not safe.”*

That sounds like a bullshit excuse to me, Hawks thought tiredly.

He honestly should have known better.

He should have expected the barrage of protests and indignation he received.

He should have known he'd black out.

When he grew aware of the world again, it was after noon. Hawks shivered in the cold and curled his sickly wings around himself. One of the voices made a small, apologetic sound but before Hawks could hear more than *"I'm sorry about—"* the emotions welled up again, turning their words into a garbled mess he could not hope to decipher.

Hawks returned to his surroundings and the sun was low in the sky. The voices overlapped but soon went silent.

"*This is going to be a problem."* Green said in a tone that suggested he was uncertain he would be able to hear himself.

"*No shit, dumbass."* Orange growled.

"*Do not berate M— Green with such language! It is unheroic."* Silver lectured loudly.

"*Suck it, tinhead."* Orange retorted.

Hawks felt his features twist into a grimace as pain lanced between his temples.

"*Guys, enough. We're hurting Hawks."* Green reminded them.

The argument Hawks could *feel* bubbling up faded away and he *breathed*.

"*Hawks?"* The commanding tone Green had used gave way to one that was much more timid. *"I'm sorry about this. We all are. But… it can't be helped. You're stuck with us, it seems. I can't tell you how— not yet— but I can give you a reason why."*

Why? Hawks thought, desperate.

Green hesitated, and Hawks got the distinct feeling he was hiding something from him. *All of them* were—

"*Because if you don't listen to us, Hero Society will fall in the next three years. We need your help to save the world."*

XXXXXXX

It turned out that when the voices said that, they did not mean immediately. Hawks had a couple months to graduate from "curl up into a ball whenever my skull tries to split" to "learn how to suck it up and be able to move when my skull tries to split" to "learn how to use his Quirk while sucking it up when my skull tries to split". It took a lot of restraint and patience on the voices' part to get him that far, because if too many voices felt strong emotions or spoke at once, Hawks was overwhelmed, nothing more than a feather in an inferno.

As he slumped against a tree and pressed his head against the bark, Hawks wondered if this was why so many people with empathic Quirks often had mental breakdowns. He could barely keep track of his own emotions. Now he had *eight* more people and their baggage to worry about. It did not help that their personalities and desires were so different. White was

as calm as Orange was explosive, but they did not balance each other out. Instead they yanked Hawks' brain in two directions, though not as badly as they once did since they had the wherewithal to realize they were causing their host pain.

As he got to know his mysterious voices— as best he could with them being so secretive and shady and all— his fears that they were Villains slowly dwindled. Even if they were Villains by definition of being criminals of some sort, they were at least not the "destroy Society and stamp on the ashes" types.

Red was the smart but uncertain one, assured in her theory and book smarts but a bit more timid when trying to put forth her ideas. White's rare but encouraging murmurs implied she should be more confident in her abilities but Hawks could sense something— *dark fear I'm sorry* ***my fault***— had badly shaken her self-esteem, causing her to… revert?

Orange was the brash, rude, but driven one, refusing to accept anything less than victory. He was the one most likely to cause Hawks pain with his shouts and anger, but he was also the one who could get the others to be quiet the most, because although screaming *"Shut the hell up!"* at full volume caused Hawks brief pain, the others instinctively listened and quieted down, helping in the long run.

Yellow was the one without a brain-to-mouth filter, though he showed his moments of perceptiveness and ingenuity. He was also the poster child for trying and failing to play it cool. Hawks could tell, because Yellow's jokes could not hide how scared he was because *they were stuck in his head—*

Green was the leader when it came down to it. The others, particularly Orange, did not seem to notice how often they deferred to him but Hawks did. However, Green tended to become flustered and overwhelmed by possibilities, devolving into rambling that could easily drown the rest of them. If that happened, White or Pink stepped in to get him to focus. Or Orange told him to shut up.

Purple's stubborn determination could rival Orange and Green's but his had a bitterness to it, as if something he desired had been dangled in front of him, only for it to be yanked away when he tried to grasp it. He spoke very little, and always seemed to pause an extra moment whenever Hawks replied to him. Hawks could tell Purple was nervous about speaking but he managed to hide why.

Pink was the most emotionally perceptive of the bunch and usually the first to notice when Hawks was being dragged under. She also managed to get Orange to stop arguing with whoever he picked a flight with that minute. Orange seemed to respect her, and although Hawks could smell a story there he could not unlock it.

Silver was loud but well-meaning with a firm and straightforward moral code Hawks admired. He was strict and blunt, but had a surprising amount of emotional control. Either that or his stubborn determination to cause Hawks the least amount of pain possible overrode even the lack of filter between their minds.

White was the most mysterious, not only because he spoke the least but because Hawks got the distinct sense he was trying *not* to say much in order to not reveal something. He was not

cold per se, but he kept Hawks at a distance.

Yes, despite the wall between them— a wall Hawks honestly wished was thicker— from his experiences over the past few months, he had come to know a few things:

There were eight people in his head. Six male, two female.

They all were around his age, probably a little older if their occasional mutters about how young Hawks was was any indication.

They tried to do *something*, and that *something* went wrong and they ended up in Hawks' head.

He had to save the world from… something.

He had to go to Hosu to save some*one* in early May.

Having a goal, even one as vague as that, helped Hawks a lot. He "drifted"— Pink's name for the times he sank into his head— less and found it easier to find himself instead of drowning in the thoughts and emotions of the others. Now that the voices were not fighting for control or his attention, it was less like having eight personalities in his brain and more like having a team of telepaths on the mental comms. Most of the time, anyway, unless someone got emotional. Then all bets were off.

Like now. Hawks bit back a groan as Orange and Purple took shots at each other, their barbs literally sharp as they stabbed his aching head. From amidst the garbled mess of words and insults, he deduced they were arguing about Quirks… and whether to try something?

Hawks slowed down and caught sight of his reflection in a river. He saw a glimpse of frayed wings and forced his gaze away.

I can't go back like this.

"*Oh, grow up. So what if the pretty bird ain't looking so pretty?"* Orange sneered.

That's not what I meant, Hawks thought tiredly. *I mean **this**.* He clasped a hand to his forehead. *We've made progress but it's too easy for me to drift. It's obvious something's wrong. If I show up like this they'll stick me in a hospital.*

"*Would that be a bad thing? You're kinda underweight. And your feathers are a bit… unhealthy-looking."* Yellow mumbled.

Hawks chose to ignore that last statement. *My Pro Hero license could be suspended and I'll be stuck in the hospital until I "recover".*

"*Become a vigilante."* Purple offered in a tone suggesting he had considered that path more than once.

"*Do you want him to get arrested?"* Red interrupted before Hawks could reply. *"We're already going to have enough trouble convincing— I shouldn't say— Convincing **them**… of*

the things."

Hawks took note of the lame ending to her sentence. For secretive voices, they sure made it obvious when they were dodging subjects. The voices often spoke about things that left Hawks knowing he was out of the loop. He would not mind except he was still unsure if these people were on the good side of the law. Worse, Hawks had a foreboding feeling they had figured out how to talk to each other without him overhearing. They were in his mind but were still capable of hiding things from him.

Wasn't that a terrifying thought?

Right. 'Them.' 'The things.' Please, keep being vague. I love that so much!

"*Your sarcasm is noted."* Red sighed.

Well, ***sorry****.* Hawks said with even more sarcasm. *I know I'm a— hopefully former by now— Commission lackey but that doesn't mean I like running around while people hide things from me!* When none of them responded— except for some annoyance from White and Orange— he gritted his teeth. *Come on! You're in my head, taking up my brain-space. Give me* ***something*** *or I'm going to go nuts for real*.

He felt them mull it over, taking advantage of the inherent chaos of having nine streams of consciousness in one head to blur their individual thoughts.

Pink spoke up. *"We should tell him. We were going to try anyway.*"

"*That was when we were separate and stable."* Purple argued. *"Now we can hardly argue without Hawks going under."*

Hawks felt a twinge of annoyance that was actually his own for once. *I can handle your secrets.*

"*It's not the secrets I'm worried about. We don't exactly have mental blocks to stop you from feeling or seeing what we are as we… reminisce."*

"*He can deal."* Orange interjected. *"I'm personally sick of this vagueness game. Listen up, Hawks."*

Hawks listened intently.

"*We're from a bad future where everyone died and Villains took over. All Might, dead. Endeavor, dead. UA, Hero Society, hell, most of Japan? All burned to the ground. The eight of us attempted to go back to the past— your present— to fix everything using a friend's Quirk, it went wrong, and we ended up stuck in you."*

Hawks nodded, then instantly regretted it and held his aching head. *Okay*.

His response stunned his head's occupants into silence.

"*...That's it?"* Orange demanded, audibly flabbergasted. *"We drop that bombshell and you don't even blink?"*

"*Heh. 'Bombshell'."* Yellow chuckled.

*I've heard of weirder things. Plus I can **feel** your emotions, you know. You're being genuine. Or delusional. I'm leaning towards the former. Now was that so hard?*

The series of 'no's he received were immensely gratifying. He really hoped the voices were older than him like he suspected because the mental image of a group of twenty-somethings looking chastised was just too good.

"*How can you just believe us, just like that?"* Green demanded, sounding more stunned than upset. *"We have no proof, we could be manipulating you, we did not even tell you **any** details —"*

Green, we live in a world where you can be born with a potted plant for a head, Hawks told him flatly. *There's probably someone with a time travel Quirk out there already. You're the ones who made it complicated.*

"*...Touche."* Green sighed. *"If only the others would be so easy to convince…"*

His misery stung Hawks and he rubbed his aching chest, grimacing. *What do you mean?*

"*Since we're like this—"* Hawks got the sense of someone gesturing at their— *his* body. *"— they're more likely to think we're crazy or a spy sent by… the boss of the guy who created the Nomus."*

Secrets, Hawks reminded him.

"*The Nomu creator's Villain name is Doctor Daruma Ujiko. One of his other names is Doctor Tsubasa."* Orange said darkly. *"He turned his own grandson into a Nomu."*

Hawks noted the names even as his stomach twisted.

"*As for his boss—"*

"*Not yet."* Green said in a tone that forbade any argument.

Hawks argued anyway because he was that kind of guy. *Do I need to say 'secrets' again—?*

"*It's not that. We need to be stabler in order to not give anything away. If they find out you know certain information you could be in danger..."*

Hawks was not exactly concerned considering his job. *What kind of danger?*

'*League of Villains' and 'Nomu' kind.*

Hawks nodded. Then he paused as he realized a tiny, insignificant, not-at-all important bit of information he did not have. *...What's a 'Nomu'? And a 'League of Villains'?*

Green's shock would have been funny if alarm did not come with it. *"Why don't you know...? When did we—? Oh God, we appeared before USJ."*

"*Yeah. We figured that out already."* Yellow pointed out.

"*Guys, we made **Hawks** vanish before USJ."* Green emphasized, voice growing high-pitched with hysteria.

His panic infected the others and Hawks might have— make that definitely passed out. When he woke, he was laying limply by the river bank. Hawks groaned and attempted to wipe the mud from his hair before realizing that endeavor was futile. He slumped against a tree, distantly noting how hungry he felt.

Was I important?

"*What?"* Red asked.

Was I important to the timeline or whatever before 'USJ', whatever that means? Hawks clarified.

"*Not to events **we** were involved in, but I don't know about the world as a whole..."*

Orange snorted. *"Are you kidding? Hawks is the Number Tw— Three Hero. Of course he was doing important saving-people shit."*

"*Well hopefully someone took up the slack and captured any Villains other-Hawks did for the past year..."* Green did not sound very confident.

The weirdness of time travel was not helping Hawks' headache any and he shut his eyes. *USJ wouldn't happen to be referring to the training facility for UA, would it? Are you former UA students? How far in the future are you from?*

A few months ago, their discomfort would have been blackout-inducing. Now, it was almost amusing.

"*You're observant."* Green mentioned.

You're avoiding the subject.

Green sighed. *"We're not going to tell you who we are. If you meet our current selves we don't want to make it weird."*

The situation is already weird but fine. Be like that.

"*...You're not going to let this go, are you?"*

Nope. Let me remind you; you're voices in my head that are telling me to do things. And you also tried to see if you could take over my body. Yes, I noticed.

Purple recoiled as if physically struck. *"I'm sorry."*

"*We were kinda desperate."* Pink whispered.

Hawks settled more comfortably against the tree. As comfortably as he could, anyway. *I'm not mad. Or I'm in shock so I can't process anything right now. Either is a possibility. Anyway, I'd like* ***some*** *trust.*

"*We'll see. You are surprisingly... calm about all of this."* Silver murmured.

I think I've gone past stressed to 'literally incapable of giving a damn'. Hawks admitted. *I might freak out later. Or maybe I'm in a coma somewhere so I subconsciously know this is my bizarre dying dream. Either way, might as well live with it. I don't have much of a choice, as usual.*

"*What's that supposed to mean?"* White asked sharply.

Nothing. Hawks raised a hand and carefully guided a few of his feathers around him. *Think I'll be able to fly without blacking out? Be honest.*

"*I give you a ninety-percent chance of not falling. However, we should start making our way towards Hosu. You aren't at top speed and considering weather patterns and commercial air traffic, along with avoiding security cameras we'll need to…"* Green's thoughts trailed off into vague mumbles.

The others' amusement tickled Hawks' consciousness, but rather than join in, he struggled to keep it at bay, unwilling to let even that positive emotion overwhelm him. None of them appeared to notice his strain, just like they failed to sense the anxiety under his laid back exterior.

XXXXXXX

Hawks went to Hosu like a good little host, listening in bemusement as his head's occupants protested that they weren't possessing him. That was, until they realized he was joking and devolved into annoyed or exasperated muttering.

As he soared over the streets and hoped no one looked up, he focused on his breaths and tried to block out Silver. If Hawks Quirk was powered by stress he would be at ten thousand percent power, his every feather quivering with tension.

He passed by a large television that was broadcasting the UA Sport's Festival and paused, watching as a student with engines in his legs fought a girl with vines for hair. Silver abruptly tried to retreat from his consciousness but Hawks merely turned away from the screen and continued on.

So. How do you know Ingenium?

"I don't." Silver said with the lying skills of a two year-old who stole a cookie from the cookie jar.

If that's true then I'm the Queen of the Sky Nymphs.

Silver did a double take. *"What is a 'Sky Nymph'?"*

Exactly. Hawks perched atop a building and scanned the area. *You know, it's a really good thing most Heroes don't do the 'secret identity' thing. In your defense, I only know you're an Iida at the moment so I'll still call you 'Silver'.*

"*How did you—?"*

You just confirmed it. Thanks for that.

It was always so fun to strike people speechless.

"*Ugh, you're so annoying."* Orange groaned.

I'm observant. It's kept me alive.

A flicker of silver caught Hawks' attention and he zeroed in on it even as his breath caught in his chest. He smacked into the top of the building a second later but staggered to his feet, trying and failing to still his shaking hands.

Silver, calm down. I c-can't focus unless you're calm.

Hawks could already feel Silver's panic infecting the others like a virus. White resisted the best and Hawks felt him shift like a wall of ice, placing himself between their host and Silver as he attempted to block the latter's rampant fear.

"Remember, he has a Quirk that lets him paralyze people if he ingests their blood." Green said in a breathy tone that suggested he was close to being caught in the whirlpool of terror.

Hawks focused on *breathing,* in and out and in and out. *I'll keep my distance and make sure I don't use my blood feathers.*

"*You **use** your blood feathers?"* Pink asked, sounding queasy.

If I have to.

"*But blood feathers have… have **blood** in them. Doesn't that hurt?"*

Yeah. But they grow back so it's fine.

"*You're just as bad as Green."* Purple muttered.

"***Focus**."* Silver snapped.

The voices went silent and retreated as much as they could. Hawks swooped into the alleyway in time to see Stain standing over Ingenium with his blade raised—

Hawks was not quite sure what happened next. One second, he was at the top of the alley. The next, he was standing protectively over Ingenium and Stain was pulling himself out of the wall. Hawks' legs quivered and his left one ached but a quick glance showed no blood on

his pants. Not from what he could tell amidst the tears and grime, anyway. Cold eyes locked onto his face, piercing the shadows of his drawn-up hood. Pale lips curled into a sneer.

"Hawks." Stain growled. "The showy Winged Hero. So much potential, but you waste time modeling for magazine covers."

I didn't have a choice, Hawks thought but did not grace him with that reply.

Instead he flung a barrage of feathers at the Hero Killer. They stabbed easily through Stain's scarf, clothes, and even the bandages on his arms, pinning him to the wall of the alley. Few flicks of his feathers yanked the weapons from Stain's clothes, flinging them far out of sight. He settled into a balanced stance, sharp gaze taking in everything in preparation for an attack.

It never came.

Hawks stood awkwardly some distance from the Hero Killer, watching as he struggled against the feathers pinning him and cursed Hero Society. He tried to focus on what Stain was saying— something about 'laziness' and how Heroes should give everything for society and blah blah blah— but Hawks barely heard him, running on adrenaline and still focused on trying to locate the threat. Eventually he— and the voices— realized the threat had been taken care of. Their shock reverberated through him and he winced.

...That's it?

"*I... I guess you were over-qualified for this."* Green mentioned, stunned.

I'm a fast and proficient long distance fighter. He's close-to-mid range. So yeah.

"*...Tensei?"* Silver whispered, normally loud voice small.

Hawks belatedly remembered Ingenium was still there and likely paralyzed. He hurried to Ingenium's side and was relieved to see only a little blood rather than the pool he expected. He hesitated and carefully scanned him. Silver *said* nothing, but with the grace of an off-railed train, his thoughts spiraled towards… Ingenium's spine?

Hawks glanced at Ingenium's back but saw no sign of injury. A hand snapped up and clasped Hawks' wrist and he stiffened, fingers twitching and curling. Being touched by another person for the first time in more than a year was like a slap and he resisted the desire to yank his arm free.

Ingenium groaned and raised his head. "Can finally… move again..." He pushed himself up, arms shaking under his weight. "I've called backup, but I'm afraid—" A helmeted head rose to meet Hawks' gaze. "*Hawks?!*"

Hawks flinched at the sound of his name, starkly reminded of when the voices first appeared. His hands twitched up to cover his ears and his shoulders hunched as he pressed his lips together. A shudder passed through him and Silver's voice reverberated through his mind, cracking and hollow.

*"He's okay. It was **that easy** . All it took was another Hero arriving at the scene and Tensei was **fine** ."*

The freak out Hawks had been ignoring pounced on him and he hunched over, wheezing. Ingenium's head snapped towards him and he flinched, backing away with a hand raised to ward off the Hero. His back smacked into the wall and he slid down to curl up at the bottom, bracing himself for an impending blackout. He heard concerned voices but could only understand Ingenium's low tones.

"I've got him. Arrest the Hero Killer. He has a paralyzing Quirk so be careful."Asphalt crunched and Hawks felt Ingenium kneel in front of him. "Hawks, can you—?"

Ingenium's words became lost as eight conflicting thoughts and emotions slammed into Hawks at once.

"*—wasn't even a fight—"*

"*It was that simple. All it took—"*

"*How many more could we have saved—?"*

"*—isn't **fair**—"*

The voices' devolved into streams of jumbled emotions and Hawks clutched at his head. He might have heard Green begging the others to calm down but none of his words broke through the sea of *anger-sorrow-frustration-fear-guilt-disappointment—*

A hand brushed Hawks' arm but he shook it off and stumbled towards the street as his vision wavered.

*Not now. Not now. **N̴̛̛̛

Red: Yaoyorozu

Orange: Bakugo

Yellow: Kaminari

Green: Midoriya

Purple: Shinso

Pink: Uraraka

Silver: Iida

White: Todoroki

This story has fan art! See it here. Thank you glorious_creativity! It's amazing! *happy squealing noises* You can see more of their art @glorious_creativity. (Edit: Fixed the links. Hopefully.) (Edit x2: Link's down again and I can't seem to fix it. Aww.)

Found (And Lost)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In Class 1-A, emotions ran high as the students sat in their seats, still winding down from the events of the Sports Festival. Some were euphoric at their victory, others contemplative, and still-others deeply upset but putting on a brave face. As Aizawa's stern gaze swept over Midoriya, briefly lingering on his bandaged arms, the one deemed 'the problem child' turned red and sank slightly in his seat. However, a lecture about his actions in the Festival— actions he would *never* regretin a million years— was not on his teacher's mind.

"Well done, all of you. You performed well." Was all Aizawa said. "There will be no school tomorrow or the day after—"

"Have you seen the news?" Kaminari gasped.

Midoriya winced, and Ashido shot her friend a look that suggested she could not decide whether to high five him for his bravery or make arrangements for his funeral.

Aizawa frowned at him, tired eyes narrowed. "Why are you scrolling through the news on your phone while class is in session?"

Kaminari's cheeks turned red but he held up his phone. "*Hawks* just saved Ingenium from the Hero Killer!"

Midoriya jolted up in his seat. "Hawks is back?"

"He saved my brother?!" Iida shouted.

The students scrambled from their seats to crowd around Kaminari. Aizawa's attempts to get them back to their seats soon faded as the teacher gave up and joined the throng to peer at the tiny screen. The video quality was awful, but the flicker of familiar red wings vanishing into an alleyway was visible enough. The camera zoomed in and focused in time to catch the moment Hawks slammed into the intimidating man menacing a silver-armored figure on the ground.

Iida sucked in a sharp breath as they vanished from view. "Can you brighten the screen?"

"It's as bright as it gets. Sorry." Kaminari apologized.

They waited with bated breath as Ingenium's sidekicks arrived. Paramedics and the police appeared soon after. Midoriya chewed his lip worriedly as Hawks was carried out on a stretcher, clearly unconscious. His unease tripled when he saw the state the Winged Hero was in. His skin was ashen, covered in grime and sweat, and his wings were tattered, flecked with patches of unhealthy grey feathers.

"Did he collapse? What a wimp." Bakugo scoffed.

Midoriya wanted to say something but kept it to himself to avoid Bakugo's ire. His friend was already angry— well, angr*ier* and more prone to explode than usual— about his victory at the Sports Festival so it was probably best not to confront him right now.

"He's clearly unhealthy." Yaoyorozu noted. "Is he sick?"

Koda's hands moved and he mumbled something too softly for Midoriya to hear.

"He says some birds can lose the color in their feathers if they're malnourished." Jiro said as she twirled one of her jacks with her finger. She did a double take and stared at Koda. "You *can* talk."

"As interesting as this is, class is still in session." Aizawa said evenly.

The students took one look at their irritated teacher and hastily returned to their seats. Only Iida remained standing, rocking from side to side as he opened and closed his mouth.

Aizawa sighed. "You may go into the hall to call your brother. If he's at the hospital, you may leave early to see him."

"Thank you, Aizawa-sensei." Iida said rapidly. He rushed out.

Aizawa pinned the rest of the class with an unamused stare. "As for the rest of you, it seems you need a *very* long and detailed reminder why we don't have our phones out while class is in session."

Ashido planted her head down and groaned into the top of her desk. "Good going, Denki."

Kaminari sank down in his seat.

XXXXXXX

Tensei Iida paced back and forth in the waiting room of Hosu General Hospital, pausing from time to time to glance anxiously at the clock. After completing his report and ensuring Stain was in police custody, he had changed into civilian clothes and rushed to the hospital, hoping to visit Hawks before visiting hours ended.

It was an understatement to say Tensei did not know the Number Three ranked Hero well. He only knew of him in passing, having never met the younger Hero face to face before. It was not a difference in rank that kept them apart, but the fact that they— mostly Hawks— were always so busy and their areas of operation rarely overlapped. Still, that did not mean Tensei was going to let Hawks be without thanking him for what he had done.

Tensei dragged a hand through his hair and repressed a shiver at the memory of the Hero Killer's attack. In hindsight he'd acted recklessly, and if not for Hawks he might not be standing here now. Seeing the Winged Hero take down the Killer Ingenium had struggled with made Tensei feel a bit inadequate if he was being honest with himself. Worse, it was clear Hawks had been nowhere close to top shape when he jumped into the fray. Tensei closed his eyes and all he could see was Hawks exhausted, bloody, and bruised face.

What happened to you in that year?

The sounds of approaching engines reached his ears and he startled, stepping so he was in front of the receptionist's desk. He was completely unprepared for his brother to come bursting through the doors of the hospital. Tenya spotted Tensei but rather than slow down, he launched himself at his brother, grabbing him in a tight hug.

"Tensei! You're okay. I came as quickly as I could because Mom said you were in the hospital—"

"She probably said I was *at* the hospital." Tensei interjected gently. "And you know you're not supposed to use your Quirk like that, right?"

Tenya balked and backed away a few feet, bowing hastily to both him and the startled receptionist. "I apologize for using my Quirk in such a disruptive manner."

"It's fine, dear." the receptionist said kindly.

Tenya whirled back to Tensei. "If you aren't hurt, why are you here?"

"I want to thank Hawks for helping me."

"Hawks was admitted?" Tenya gasped. He clapped a hand to his forehead. "Of course he was. I was aware of that fact previously. I saw the video."

Tensei grimaced. "There's a video?" He began mentally preparing himself for the rather tactless questions reporters would shoot at him in the near future.

Tenya bobbed his head in a nod. "It was of bad quality but it showed Hawks taking down the Hero Killer before he collapsed." An uncharacteristic scowl flashed across his face. "The Hero Killer had you pinned. He could have— He almost hurt you."

Tensei gritted his teeth. It was disconcerting to know that someone had been near enough to record the incident and done nothing to intervene but he knew that if a civilian had tried they would just get into legal trouble. "I suppose it can't be helped..."

"He almost hurt you." Tenya repeated, as if to himself. "I saw a list of his crimes. The Hero Killer… he's a *monster*. How could he murder Heroes like that? They had, lives, families, friends… but he *killed* them. And for what?"

"According to his rant, he thinks all Heroes other than All Might are fakes." Tensei sighed and dragged a hand through his hair. "Apparently my crime was not being strong enough to work alone."

"*What?!*" Tenya demanded. "That's preposterous! You're a great Hero, one to be admired. You save so many people every day. How can he consider you a fake?"

"Stain holds Heroes to impossible standards while failing to understand that not everyone can be All Might. Not just physically, but morally as well. Stain refuses to see that." Tensei explained briefly. "He can't even see his own morals are horribly warped and corrupt."

Tenya's blue eyes darkened. Before Tensei could worry, he took a breath and his expression cleared. "But at least he has been brought to justice."

"Yes." Tensei murmured. "He will be."

"Excuse me? Mister Ingenium?" The receptionist waved to Tensei. "You're the one asking about Hawks, correct?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She smiled and pointed at one of the nurses who came through the doors. "That's his nurse. You can ask her about visiting. She might say no since visiting hours are almost over."

I'd better hurry then. "Thank you." Tensei approached the nurse as Tenya lingered at his side. "Excuse me?" He waited until she looked at him with an undeniably disinterested expression. "Could you tell me if Hawks is awake?"

"He's awake." the nurse said briefly.

Tensei breathed a sigh of relief. "Can he have visitors?"

The nurse stared at him, unblinking. "Are you family?"

Tensei shifted under her sharp gaze. "No."

An eyebrow flicked up. "A friend?"

"...No."

The other eyebrow joined the first. "A colleague?"

Tenya bristled at her dismissive tone but Tensei put a hand on his arm to keep him quiet.

"I'm a fellow Pro Hero." Tensei said lamely. "Hawks saved my life."

The nurse's stern expression softened from diamonds to corundum. "I suppose you can see him. He hasn't had any visitors. All his contacts went to voicemail." Her gaze flicked to Tenya and her lips pursed. "They might not know he is here yet and I'd hate for them to find out through social media."

Tensei held back a frown at the implied dig towards his brother but the jab went right over Tenya's head.

"The police haven't seen him yet?" Tensei questioned as they walked towards Hawks' room.

"He only woke an hour ago. He appears to be mostly coherent so they said they will come to speak to him soon."

"'Mostly'?" Tensei echoed cautiously.

“I am not allowed to discuss medical matters with you since you are not on his list of contacts.” the nurse reminded him. “However, just so you are aware, Hawks hasn’t spoken a word since he woke. Did he speak at all before he fell unconscious?”

Tensei went over the confrontation with Stain again— ignoring the shiver down his spine as he recalled how close he had come to death— and shook his head.

The nurse frowned and turned away. “I see.” She halted in front of the door for room A-38 and tapped on it twice before entering. “Hawks, you have visitors.”

Tensei and Tenya stepped into the room. The Hero sitting on the bed turned away from the television, which was playing footage of the Sports Festival. Tenya’s fight with that vine girl was on the screen and Tensei felt a bubble of pride at his little brother’s accomplishment. It popped and disintegrated as Hawks’ sharp golden gaze met his.

Hawks somehow looked both better *and* worse than he had in the alleyway. On the better side, the blood and grime had been washed off and his dirty costume removed. On the worse side, without the dirt the hollows in his cheeks and the sharpness of his collar bone were undeniable.

Worst of all were his wings. The once-red feathers were mottled with sickly greys and browns, and Tensei could see patches missing. Some of those patches had fresh bandages and Tensei realized the feathers had been violently ripped out. He repressed a wince. He was not one to pick up stray animals but he could not help but compare Hawks to an injured, wild bird taken fresh off the street after it had been struck by a car.

It’s the wild look in his eyes, Tensei realized as he approached the bed. *He looks trapped.* He noted how Hawks followed his movements with his eyes, shoulders rigid. *And scared.*

“I’ll leave you to it.” the nurse said, either not noticing her patient’s unease or not caring.

She left the two brothers and one patient alone to stare awkwardly at each other. The times Ingenium had seen Hawks on TV, the Winged Hero was always smiling or talking with a laid-back, carefree attitude. He was not doing any of those things now as he stared unblinkingly at his visitors, who were starting to feel more like intruders. Tensei saw a film flick over golden eyes and blinked his own, fleshy lids.

Hawks has a third eyelid?

Tensei put that little tidbit of information away and cleared his throat. “Hello, Hawks.” He belatedly realized Hawks might not recognize him out of costume. “It’s me, Tensei Iida. Ingenium?”

A feathery eyebrow rose as if to say “*No duh.*” and Tensei realized his early assumption was incorrect. He pushed away his surprise that Hawks recognized him and nodded to Tenya.

“And this is my brother, Tenya Iida. He’s a student at UA.”

Tenya bowed sharply. “Hello, Number Three Hero Hawks. It is an honor to meet you.”

Golden eyes snapped to him and widened slightly. They darted away just as quickly and looked past Tenya at the wall. His fingers clenched on his blankets until they were white. Then his brow crinkled and he squinted, lips moving, but no sound came out. Tensei was no lip reader but he saw what was probably ‘why’ and ‘here’?

“I just wanted to thank you. You saved my life.” Tensei explained. “I would’ve been a goner if you hadn’t arrived when you did.”

“Tensei—” Tenya protested.

Tensei reached out and put a hand atop his brother’s head. “It’s true, Tenya. Stain had me down and paralyzed. Without assistance, I was done.” He grimaced. "Hawks, you took him down so *quickly*. I guess that shows how much I could improve."

Hawks tensed and his smile turned as fake as plastic. His chin tucked and he frowned briefly at the low collar of his hospital scrubs before chewing nervously on his lip. It was a far cry from the confident Winged Hero always seen on TV, but Tensei was beginning to suspect that was the Hawks he wanted the public to see. Honestly, he should have known that already. He was a Pro Hero too, after all. The exhausted young man sitting in a hospital bed would not inspire confidence in the public. In fact, Hawks looked like he was bracing himself for a reprimand. His gaze flicked to the television.

“Sports...” Tensei and Tenya jumped at Hawks’ soft, hoarse voice. Tensei had to strain his ears in order to hear him. “...watching...” He trailed off again. “...did well...” Hawks stopped speaking and looked at Tenya expectantly.

For once, Tenya was quicker on the uptake than his brother. “Oh! Thank you!” His back straightened as his chest puffed with pride. “Yes, I got third place alongside my classmate Tokoyami. Although I wish I had gotten further I am satisfied with my accomplishment and shall take this as a lesson to improve myself.”

Hawks fake smile relaxed into something more genuine but when he glanced at Tensei he jerked his gaze away. The heart rate monitor attached to him beeped at a more rapid pace.

Tensei could have slapped himself. Hawks probably did not need to reminded about his fight — more like a one-sided capture— with Stain, and Ingenium was a walking reminder of how close he had been to finding a corpse instead of a Hero. Tensei ignored the shiver that went up his spine. He opened his mouth to apologize for his overstep when a shout came through the closed door.

"Lady, *I don't care* if it's after hours! I am going to see my friend and you are *not* going to stop me—"

The thin piece of wood stood no chance against the Rabbit Hero Miruko, who yanked it open and stormed through, only to freeze in the doorway. Behind her, the nurse threw up her hands and stormed off, but Miruko did not notice. Or she did not care. From what Tensei had heard about her, it was likely the latter.

She stared at the Hero on the bed, rigid from her eartips to her feet and with an indescribable expression on her face. Hawks mouthed what was likely her name and waved. Tensei blinked and she was across the room, arms locked tightly around Hawks' thin shoulders. Red-and-grey wings went still.

"You're safe...." Miruko said thickly.

Tensei put a hand on Tenya's shoulder. "Let's leave them alone." he whispered.

He and Tenya quietly slipped outside.

XXXXXXX

Hawks sat silently in Miruko's warm embrace long after Ingenium and his brother left. The voices were quiet but he could feel flickers of building tension rippling between them. It settled deep in Hawks' stomach and crawled outward like a plague until his whole body felt prickly and *wrong*, like he did not belong in his own skin. He let go of Miruko and wrapped his arms around himself, squeezing.

Keep it together, he begged.

"Sorry." Green apologized in a wheezy tone. *"I don't know what's happening."* He took a shaky breath. *"Anyone else feel claustrophobic?"*

"Hawks?" Miruko's strained voice told him she'd been calling his name for a while. "What's wrong?"

Hawks immediately shoved his discomfort away— as best he could, anyway. *'Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face*,' he reminded himself. *'You are a hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

Flares of confusion, shock— and was that anger?— stabbed at him.

"*Who told you that?"* Green croaked.

Hawks ignored him— *Focus on the now*— glanced at Miruko, and planted on a smile. *Just feeling a little off. I don't know why.*

Miruko didn't reply. The crease between her eyebrows only got deeper. "... Did you try to answer me?"

Hawks shot her a befuddled look. *Uh, yeah?*

Miruko shifted and crossed her arms. "Hawks, you need to *say* your words."

I have been, Hawks protested, only to realize he felt no vibrations in his throat. Heat rushed to his cheeks. How long had he been doing that? *Sorry.*

"*Out loud*, Hawks." Miruko emphasized.

"Sorry." Hawks felt the strain in his throat this time. He cleared his throat and regretted it when that made the ache worse. "I said… I'm just… feeling a little off."

"...Okay." Miruko replied and Hawks could practically hear the things she wanted to say but didn't. For Miruko to be that tactful... it meant she was *really* worried about him. Wonderful. She dragged a hand across her eyes and Hawks belatedly noticed how puffy they were.

His brow wrinkled and he poked her arm. "What's this? Don't tell me the mighty Miruko's been crying 'cause of little old me?"

"As if. I cried because I have to deal with you again." Miruko huffed. Her annoyed look crumbled and she yanked him into another bone-crushing hug. "You *idiot*. Do you know how scared I was?"

Hawks laid his head on her shoulder. "Sorry. I didn't mean to vanish. I just couldn't—"

The trees around him shattered, and Hawks' head split in two. For a moment he thought he had somehow been struck by lightning, but then pain tore through him from head to foot to wingtip. Red-hot claws sank into his skull, ripping his brain apart and he might have screamed. He distantly felt his body hit the dirt, but the dull ache from the collision was dwarfed by the fire in his skull. Another scream caught in his throat, choking him with its intensity, but boiling lava blocked his airways, spreading out over his whole body and leaving him writhing in pain—

Hawks jolted back into the present, breathing harsh. He gritted his teeth and put his head in his hands.

"I'm fine." he said before Miruko could ask. "Headache."

"Do you want me to get the nurse?" Miruko looked ready to bolt to the door and bodily drag back the first one she found.

Hawks shook his head and moved his hands to cover his eyes, blocking out the light. "Let's talk about something else."

"*Bring up the internships."* Pink offered.

"*I almost forgot!"* Green gasped. *"We need you to send a few intern requests. You did last time and if you don't it might mess something up."*

I know, Hawks replied. *Why do you think I was watching footage of the Sports' Festival?* He let his gaze slide back to the television screen. "So did you watch the Sports' Festival?" He pretended he was not carefully feeling every word as he spoke, just to be sure he was saying them out loud.

Miruko's eyes narrowed but she accepted the change in topic. "Yeah, with Best Jeanist. We actually had a couple drinks if you can believe it. He may be a bit uptight but it turns out he can have fun if he wants to."

"*Yeah right. He's got too big of a stick up his—"*

"*Hush, Orange."*

"See anyone you want to take on?" Hawks asked, forcing himself to *focus*.

"Nope." She eyed the screen critically. "I've had enough of being a 'team player' while trying to find you." Her ears twitched and her jaw clicked shut.

Hawks felt his lips curve into a huge smile. "You *worked with a team* for me, Ms. I-Work-Alone? D'awwwww, you do care!"

Despite his teasing tone, Hawks was genuinely touched. He knew how much Miruko hated relying on others. Miruko's ears flicked and her cheeks went red. Hawks imagined the red going up to the tips of her ears like in a cartoon and held back a giggle. She noticed his muffled mirth and glowered at him.

"Let's go back to talking about bratty interns, yeah?" She growled in warning.

"Back to interns." Hawks agreed sweetly. "Could you put in a few requests for me?"

"...You're going to jump back into work right away?" Miruko sighed and looked to the ceiling for patience. "That's so you."

"I'll take time off when I'm dead." Hawks said glibly. He winced at the barrage of emotions from the voices but they stifled themselves before he could lose himself. It was a close thing. For a second he swore he saw blood on his chest— "So could you?"

"Sure." Miruko smirked. "I'll add it to the list of things you owe me for."

"Please don't take my soul. I'm very attached to it— Ow."

Hawks winced as she punched him in the arm. The blow was light for one of her friendly jabs, proving yet again she was more worried than she'd like him to know. He decided not to push her. She had already done so much for him.

If I went missing I thought everyone would search for a bit but move on. I never knew I could rely on someone else like this, he thought. *It's… nice.*

"What brats do you want running around your agency?" Miruko asked.

"Fumikage Tokoyami, Shoto Todoroki, and Tenya Iida."

Silver's quiet, surprised gasp was nearly smothered by Green's distressed cry. *"You can't— Wait, Stain's in prison and Ingenium is okay. That means Iida won't go after him…"*

"***Shut up**, Green."* Orange hissed.

"—put in the requests." Miruko was saying when Hawks could hear again. She cocked her head. "Let me guess why: bird, Endeavor's son, speed."

A laugh bubbled in Hawks chest. It quickly became a coughing fit. It passed before Miruko could make good on her threat to— likely literally— grab the nurse, who Hawks was ninety percent sure hated his guts.

Someone tapped on the door. The nurse came in— speak of the devil— looking more annoyed than usual as she was followed by two cops. Hawks recognized the policemen as Chief Kenji Tsuragamae but the detective's name slipped his mind.

Green sucked in a sharp breath. *"They brought Tsukauchi here?"*

What's the problem? Hawks asked, instantly alert.

"He usually doesn't work in this sector." Silver explained. *"They probably brought him in because of his lie detecting Quirk."*

"They're already suspicious of us." Orange snarled. *"Great."*

Is he with the Commission? Hawks demanded. *They would love having a Quirk like that.* He may have been a Commission lackey but that didn't mean he knew the identities of all their agents, especially the ones they had in the police force.

"Tsukauchi doesn't work for the Commission." Green said instantly.

How are you so sure?

Green hesitated and danced around the subject. Damn the voices for learning how to do that. *"He has what would be considered vital secret information. Information that the Commission were blindsided by in our timeline."*

Hawks curiosity piqued. *Such as?*

"Hawks?" Hawks blinked as Miruko waved her hand in front of his face. She schooled her expression and leaned back but not before Hawks caught the worry on her face. "You zoned out."

Not the first time, Hawks said.

Miruko's ears twitched. "Out loud."

Hawks winced. "Sor...ry?" He made sure to feel the word as he spoke it.

Miruko ruffled his hair forcefully and he scowled. "Don't apologize."

"Hero Hawks?" Tsuragamae approached and inclined his head. "I'm Kenji Tsuragamae, the Chief of Hosu Police Department. This is Detective Naomasa Tsukauchi. We'd like to ask you some questions about your disappearance."

Hawks knew that was not the only questions they wanted to ask. They would first make sure he was who he said he was. It was Rule Number One in Interrogation 101, especially since he was such a suspicious case. And there was simply no way the police and Hero Commission

were not suspicious of him. He nodded and tried to ignore the uneasy buzzing from the voices.

“Excellent.” Tsuragamae glanced at Miruko and opened his mouth.

"I'm staying." She said in a tone that dared them to argue.

“Very well.” Hawks wondered if Tsuragamae was so agreeable because having a strong Pro Hero in the room could be beneficial if things went south. The dog-headed police chief nodded at Tsukauchi. “Detective?”

Tsukauchi pulled up a chair and sat down to make himself seem more approachable. Interrogation 101 right there. "Let’s start with the basics. What's your name?"

"Hawks." He said simply, as another rule of Interrogation 101 was to not give more information than what was asked.

"Your civilian name?"

Hawks resisted the shameful instinct to drop his gaze. "I don't know it anymore."

“*How do you not know your own name?”* Orange demanded.

Hawks smothered the urge to smile bitterly. *Do you remember the names of every stuffed animal you had when you were a child? I haven’t heard my name since my parents s— since the Commission took me. Even before that, I was usually called ‘brat’ or ‘you’. So eventually I just… forgot it.*

The Commission signed every legal document for Hawks, stepping in to represent him in such matters like a guardian with a child who could not be trusted with their own life. The only thing he signed were autographs.

After all, the public only cared about Hawks, not the person behind the visor. All Might’s civilian identity was unknown, so why should their pet project “perfectly trained Hero” Hawks be any different? Why should the person he was before they nabbed him even exist? To the Commission, a civilian identity was useless at best and an unnecessary weakness at worst. They wanted a Hero and Symbol for people to admire, not a person who showed they were just human.

Both Hawks and Orange denied that the latter was disturbed by this.

Tsukauchi looked unsurprised by his claim. That was concerning. Did he suspect the truth, or had he been told? "Birthday?"

At least he knew that one. "December 28th."

“Blood type?”

“B.”

“Quirk?”

“Fierce Wings.”

Hawks felt Green shift at the back of his mind but he stifled himself before he could share his thoughts. The voices were getting very, *very* good at that. He was not sure whether he should be concerned.

Tsukauchi looked down at the clipboard he was holding. "Where were you?"

"In a forest. I don’t remember which one."

"You were in the forest the whole time?"

Hawks opened his mouth to say yes but paused. "…I think so."

Tsukauchi’s expression did not change. “Why do you only think so? You aren’t certain?”

Crap.

“*You have to stay honest.”* Green reminded him miserably.

“*Like hell he does!”* Orange exploded. *“If they find out about us—”*

“*Don’t tell them about us then.”* White said levelly.

“Hawks?” Tsukauchi was leaning forward, his brows drawn together. “Did you hear my question?”

“Yeah.” Hawks mumbled, fighting against the voices’ emotions as they bubbled up like molten lava. His mind slowed, then blanked like a computer struggling to go through too much data and he flinched. “Uh, what was it?”

“Why aren’t you certain whether you were in the forest the whole year?” Tsukauchi asked slowly.

Orange and White were arguing.

Pink and Green were trying to break them up.

Silver was trying to bring back order and failing.

Red was stressed.

Now Yellow was stressed.

Now Purple was stressed—

Please focus, Hawks begged but his plea went unheard. Crap, he couldn’t black out now.

"You've been experiencing blackouts?" Tsukauchi asked sharply and Hawks realized he had spoken aloud.

*Crap crap crap **shit***— “Yes.” he whispered, voice distant to his own ears.

The two police officers exchanged a significant glance. “So you can’t verify that you were in the woods for an entire year?”

“I… guess not.” Hawks admitted. His stomach twisted into knots, and not just because of himself.

“*Oh yeah. This is going great.”* Orange sneered. *“Who’s ready to go on the run?”*

“*You’re **not** helping.”* Pink snapped, losing patience.

Hawks could feel himself losing control. The emotions coming off of the others were too strong and they dragged him under. He was drowning. He saw Tsukauchi’s lips moving and struggled to hear him, missing part of his question.

“Repeat that?” he forced out.

Tsukauchi was frowning. “Can you tell me how your wings ended up like that?”

“Wings?” Hawks breathed faintly and—

*The face looking back at him was his own. He could see that clearly, even under all the blood and bruises marring his ashen skin. Golden eyes were defiant, yet filled with unimaginable pain as a burning palm was pressed to his shoulder. A bare shoulder, where the only red in sight was blood. The hand shoved him down, and from this angle they could clearly see two ragged, crimson scars where bones once attached to his back. **His wings were gone** —*

"Hawks!" Miruko was in his face again. This time she didn't bother hiding her concern. "Are you with me?"

Hawks released a sharp gasp of air. “My wings. Rumi, *they cut off my wings*—”

Miruko’s dark skin drained of color. She grasped his shoulders. “Hawks, your wings are fine. See, they’re *fine*.”

Hawks saw red at his shoulder and flinched away. “*Bleeding*—”

“No you’re not.” Miruko said firmly. “Your wings are fine.” She reached out and Hawks felt her touch feathers. “See? You’re okay.”

Hawks pulled his wings close to his body, shaking his head rapidly. The police were still there and he forced down the sudden urge to scream at them to leave. *Play nice like always, Hawks, or you’ll get in even more trouble.*

“Back to our previous topic.” Tsukauchi said.

He ignored Miruko's glare. Hawks wished he could share her animosity because at least that would only be one emotion instead of the unease-anger-fear-guilt-panic-confusion-*sorrysosorryyouhavebeen—*

"If you were in the forest the whole time, why didn't you come home?"

The knots in Hawks' stomach tightened. "I couldn't come back like this."

"Like what?" Tsukauchi asked.

Hawks could barely breathe. It wouldn't matter if he blacked out from the voices. Soon he'd black out from a simple lack of air. The voices realized this and grew more and more panicked until a shout tore through them like a knife.

"***Quiet, all of you!***"

The voices went dead silent with the exception of one.

Purple took a shuddering breath. *"Hawks, you're putting us all in danger. Why did you say that?"* He spoke coldly, but Hawks could feel the guilt lurking behind his steady tone.

Despite that, anger flared through him at the accusation. *Well* ***excuse me*** *for having—*

"Hawks, ***drift****."* Purple commanded.

Hawks's vision blurred and awareness faded away.

XXXXXXX

Golden eyes stared at Tsukauchi without seeing him, pupils faded to a dull gray. For a heart-stopping, illogical moment, he thought Hawks had died, but the heart monitor— which had been beeping rapidly in a panic— now beeped slowly and serenely. Hawks looked equally serene, his expression relaxed and his hands limp in his lap. If not for his glazed expression, Tsukauchi might think he was simply deep in thought and nothing was amiss. He knew better.

"Get out."

Miruko's statement was not a request. Nor was it a threat. It was simply a demand, one which would be forcibly carried out if the two police ignored it. Tsukauchi could not blame her for her quiet, burning anger, anger which would explode into a violent fury if the wrong things was said. He put a hand on Tsurugamae's shoulder to stop him from protesting.

"We'll come back at a later time to ask about Stain."

"Yeah. Whatever." Miruko muttered.

She yanked the door open and glared at them until they stepped out. The nurse was waiting outside, standing in a way that suggested she had been about to enter.

"Hawks isn't responding." Miruko said.

The nurse shot the police a scathing look and swept into the room with the Rabbit Hero, slamming the door shut behind them.

Tsurugamae put a hand to his head. “Please tell me that was worth it.”

“It was.” Tsukauchi assured him hollowly.

His nose twitched. "Well?"

Tsukauchi took a moment to adjust his hat and collect himself. "Nothing alarming, but he's definitely hiding something. The blackouts are what’s most concerning."

Tsurugamae rubbed a hand over his eyes and growled in agreement. “So that part is true? Wonderful. If he had blackouts we cannot reliably verify where he’s been.” He sighed. “At least we’ve confirmed it is Hawks.”

"Yes. Just like the Commission asked.”

Tsukauchi’s kept his expression neutral and his tone flat even though he wanted nothing more than to scowl and release the ugly bitterness welling up in his chest. He understood why the Commission wanted him to verify that Hawks was who he claimed, but he *hated* being used like this. Still, there was no reason to deny their request for his help. Except this request was not like most Tsukauchi had to use his Quirk. This felt less like questioning of a suspicious party and more like shoving down someone who was already struggling to keep their head above water.

His fingers tightened around the clipboard he held. “I'm no doctor but I think it would be wise to delay Hawks' return to work."

Tsuragamae dragged a hand through his fur. "The Commission won't allow it."

Tsukauchi glanced down at the papers he had been given by the medical staff, with the Hero Commission’s permission, of course. His gaze slid to the words circled in red, and he wondered if the nurse had done that to make a point.

Pending Diagnoses (Consult other physicians) : PTSD, Selective Mutism, and Dissociation.

“This isn’t right.” he said. “Hawks is a person, not a machine. They can’t expect him to go back to work like nothing happened.”

“They expect him to and he will so don’t poke your nose into this.” Tsuragamae warned. He sighed and clapped Tsukauchi on the shoulder. “I mean it. This isn’t your fight.”

Tsukauchi did not reply, keeping his thoughts to himself as discontent pooled in his stomach. He knew he had been used to see whether the Hero Commission’s star Pro Hero was a threat. Everyone deep enough in the Pro Hero community had their suspicions about Hawks’ background. He came out of nowhere, started his own agency at eighteen, and got into the Top Ten before he was twenty.

To Tsukauchi's detective mind, the situation *reeked* of a child being bought and groomed to be a Pro Hero. If that were true and Hawks had no choice on what he became, no one could do anything about it without shaking the foundation of Hero Society. Hell, Tsukauchi did not even need analytical skills to know all that.

After all, *he* might have been another drafted Commission-bred Hero if things had been different.

Tsukauchi thought about how All Might would react if he found out and grimaced. Toshinori was a great man, but the same thing that let him see the best in people like Endeavor also made him blind to the black marks on their souls. Tsukauchi felt dirty just from doing as the Commission ordered and using his Quirk while pushing Hawks to see how he'd react.

As he exited the hospital with Miruko and the nurse's glares locked in his mind, he vowed would *not* do that again. They may have used him today, but he was not under the Commission's thumb and never would be with All Might around. Tsukauchi was not one for politics, but maybe he should find a way to extend that protection to Hawks. The kid needed more people to have his back.

XXXXXXX

Hawks returned to consciousness in the middle of the night. He breathed in sharply, pulling sterile hospital air into his lungs. Bloodshot red eyes peered at him from the shadows and he winced.

"...Hi."

"That's all you have to say?" Miruko snapped. "You *sank into your head* and were unresponsive for *hours* and you just wake up and go 'hi' like nothing—" She stopped herself mid-rant, ears going limp. "…'Blackouts', huh?"

"Yeah." Hawks avoided looking at her. "I call it 'drifting'."

"I can see why." Miruko said stiffly. She rose from her seat and stretched, cracking her neck and flexing her fingers to make the bones pop.

"Where are you going?" Hawks asked warily.

"To get the nurse. And to tell the Commission they can take their 'clean bill of health' and shove it up their collective asses."

Hawks caught her arm before she could storm out. "You know I can't afford to have time off." He planted on a fake smile and winked. "The public needs to be reassured I'm fine."

'*You are a Hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.*'

Miruko's lips thinned with displeasure. "I *hate* them."

Hawks knew she was not talking about the public. "You don't mean that."

“I *really* do.”

“They keep the public safe.” Hawks said, tone accidentally going flat as if he were reciting something. “It’s right in their name—”

“At what cost?” Miruko demanded. “Hawks, do you remember what you were like when we first worked together?” She continued before he could answer. “Your agency was close to mine, so my agents encouraged me to mentor the rising rookie and get some publicity points. It was supposed to be easy. I wasn’t supposed to care. But you know what happened?”

Silence fell between them and Hawks realized she was expecting a response this time. He avoided her eyes. “I collapsed from exhaustion.”

“Correction: you *fainted in midair from overwork* and I had to catch you.” Miruko snapped. “And when you woke up, you tried to run off and save the day without resting because— and I quote— *‘I’m sorry I was lazy.* ***I promise you can punish me later****.’* You— a barely-eighteen year-old— said that because of your so-called ‘*collapse from exhaustion*’.”

“I haven’t been *that* bad since then.” Hawks mumbled.

“You *never* should have been that bad.” Miruko growled. “The Commission doesn’t create Heroes; they try to turn people into perfect Hero-*machines*. You shouldn’t be out of the hospital for a month, but I bet you’ll be ‘cleared’ tomorrow. They don’t give a damn about your health.”

“I know.” Hawks admitted tiredly. “But what else am I supposed to do? I’m stuck working for them until I die.”

Technically he was stuck until he paid off the debts he had accrued from being trained and housed by the Commission until adulthood, but he knew he could never pay it off unless he miraculously won the lottery twenty times over. And then married a millionaire. And then won a few more lotteries.

Even as the Number Three Hero, Hawks barely made enough to make ends meet once the Commission and his parents took their shares— as it was dictated his parents were owed in a contract made when he was six. Of course, that meant he had to borrow the more expensive luxuries prestigious Heroes like him were expected to own. The expensive clothes he wore for photo shoots and charity balls were loaned to him by the Commission, which only added to his debt.

Hawks knew it was to keep him chained to the Commission that molded him into a popular, marketable Pro Hero, because given the choice, being Number Three was not a priority of his.

But the Commission could not afford to have their near-twenty year pet project go to waste. Hawks was their investment, and anything less than Number Three was unacceptable. So they expected repayment for training him and hung his debts over his head to remind him exactly who snatched him from an impoverished home and made him a Pro Hero. It all skirted on the edge of legal, with any existing documents using fancy wording to cover up

that Hawks did not choose to become a Hero, was not willingly giving his absent parents financial support, and was essentially the Commission's caged bird for life.

It was his own fault. He'd been young, wide-eyed, and stupid. Maybe if he hadn't let slip that he wasn't sure he wanted to be a Pro Hero and *maybe* if he'd acted like the reverent, perfect Hero they wanted instead of showing he was not one hundred percent on board, the Commission wouldn't have felt the need to keep him chained to them with a metal collar around his neck and clamps binding his wings.

"Right. *You* can do nothing." Miruko spat. "Which is why *I* am."

"Please don't cause the collapse of Society." Hawks begged, only half-joking.

"It's tempting. Mockingjay would help me." She stood and flipped her white hair over her shoulder. "I'll get those internship requests out. See you around, Baby Bird."

Hawks waited until she left to turn his thoughts inward, where the voices were being suspiciously quiet.

What. The hell.

"*Hey, that's my line!"* Orange shouted. *"What the hell was that?"*

Hawks ignored his anger— and the burning questions swirling through the others' minds.

"*I'm sorry."* Purple whispered.

*You **made** me drift! How the hell did you do that?*

"My Quirk lets me control people if they respond to me."

Purple sounded absolutely miserable as he spoke of his power. Hawks' fingers dug into his sheets. *You **controlled** me.*

"*You were panicking. **I** was panicking. If things went on like that we'd be imprisoned or worse."*

Hawks ground his teeth. *I had it handled.*

"*I don't think you did."* Green mentioned.

So that makes this okay? Hawks snapped.

"*Of course not. Purple won't do it again."*

"*I promise I won't."* Purple whispered.

Hawks could feel his guilt festering like an open wound. His kinder nature got the best of him and his anger slipped away. *I believe you. But we are going to have a talk about boundaries,*

got it? He settled more comfortably on the bed, mind wandering. *Did you use it to quiet the others?*

"*Yes, he did. We're not mad."* Pink was quick to assure Purple.

"*Like **hell** we aren't."* Orange snarled, but there was little fire behind his claim.

"*It's easy for him to use his Quirk on us since our thoughts are so open. Unlike with speech we have few ways to keep silent so we inadvertently respond to him."* Green explained quickly.

Hawks forced his lingering terror back and made himself *breathe* and think analytically. *We might have to use that in emergency situations where I can't afford to be overwhelmed by you guys. And…* He did *not* think about the brief flashes of his future self's fate he had seen in their minds. *...if I have to intentionally drift for some reason, it might be good for that too.*

Purple's surprise reverberated through the group along with a tentative and easily-breakable hope. *"You think so?"*

Hawks hummed an affirmative and chose not to acknowledge the whispers of *"destined to be a Villain Villain **Villain**"* he could hear deep in Purple's thoughts. *You blindsided me and that's a low blow, but that's in the past. Your Quirk could really help keep us in order. If you guys are willing, that is.*

"*Of course. We trust Purple with our lives."* Silver said enthusiastically.

Then I will as well, Hawks decided.

Purple pulled back from them all, trying and failing to hide his emotions, and Hawks knew he was touched.

"*You're a good guy, Hawks."* he murmured. *"I wish we'd met you sooner."*

XXXXXXX

Hawks was completely unsurprised that he was released from the hospital the next day. Honestly, the only thing that could surprise him any less was the sun rising in the sky.

His nurse looked ready to commit murder on his behalf as she gave him a final once over, but she professionally kept her thoughts to herself. He sat patiently on the hospital bed, fingers itching to grab the clothes Miruko had left for him. Once the nurse was satisfied he was not about to collapse— "Bureaucracy should stay out of the medical field. Do they *want* you right back here, hmm? Ignorant, greedy paper-eaters!"— she reluctantly cleared him and left him to get dressed.

Hawks happily grabbed his clothes and shed the uncomfortable hospital gown. He immediately caught sight of his bare chest and paused. His gaze wandered over his torso, taking in pale skin and old scars, and his breath hitched. Bubbles of discomfort pulsed from Pink and Red and his skin crawled. He averted his gaze.

You okay in there?

"*Fine."* Pink lied like a lying liar. *"I just— um. Being in this body feels wrong."*

I understand, Hawks thought faintly as his stomach churned with nausea. He rubbed his arms and breathed slowly. *At least I'm not super muscly. I'm built for speed more than power.*

"*Wait a minute."* Green mumbled to himself. *"Hawks hasn't grown facial hair in a year despite us being in the woods for the entire time. Could Pink and Red's presences— or could it be all of us?— have messed with the balance of— And-I-am-****not****continuingthatlineofthought****NOPE****—"*

"*That's right."* Red interrupted. She spoke with the strained tone of someone struggling to stay distracted from something unsettling. *"Your costume tends to hide it but you're rather lithely built."*

"*And short."* Yellow added innocently.

Hawks pouted. *Am not.*

"*You **are** kinda petite compared to a lot of Heroes."* Green mused and Hawks could *feel* the incoming muttering session. *"In muscle mass and height, I mean. I think all of us except Pink are taller than you in the future. I wonder if it's a bird Quirk thing since To— er, Black? Yeah, we'll call him 'Black'. He was pretty small too."* He blanched. *"Oh no that was mean. I'm sorry!"*

It's too late. You've revealed your true thoughts, Hawks lamented dramatically. *Even with eight voices in my head, none defend me. I'm all alone, in this cruel dark world that's filled with giants looking down on me.*

"*Use those wings of yours to fly up to their level then."* White offered.

The other voices burst out laughing and Hawks had to stifle some giggles of his own. Among the cackles, he thought he heard White ask what he said but he was not certain. What was important was Pink and Red had calmed down and Hawks' stomach stopped churning.

Crisis averted.

He put on his shoes and began making sure everything was neatly in place. He had no doubt a swarm of reporters were waiting outside for him so he had to look as little like a wreck as possible. His fingers brushed through his feathers and he froze.

...I died horribly in your future, didn't I?

"*It **won't** happen again."* Green said fiercely.

His determination swamped the flickers of— *blood torture ash fire*— images Hawks could sense from the others and they all stayed above water. For now. He shivered and touched his wings— still there— before exiting the hospital room. A few people recognized him— kinda

hard not to— but they had more tact than the average reporter and kept their distance. Hawks smiled politely at them anyway and put his hands in his pockets.

Is there anything you want to tell me about my possible interns?

Silver cleared his throat. *"Why would we ever have such information about first-year students from UA?"*

I know you're Tenya Iida, Silver.

"*...No, I am not. You are mistaken."*

Hawks was torn between amusement and exasperation. *This is ridiculous. You know I'm just going to find out the rest of your identities, right?*

"*You have found out no one's identity. Certainly not mine."*

Uh huh. Still would like some basic info about my possible students. Though… to be honest, I'm not that invested in teaching the future generations, Hawks admitted. *The thought of training them makes me uncomfortable.*

"Why?" Green asked.

Hawks tried not to think about long days of isolation in white walls with only harsh training to look forward to and unempathetic trainers for company. He tried not to remember tears and the heart-stopping panic as he struggled to perform each task perfectly or face the consequences. He pushed away all memories of staring blankly at the wall, hoping he was not shaking as his trainer told him it was time for him to learn how to resist enhanced int—

No particular reason.

"...We saw that." Green whispered.

Hawks winced. *You saw nothing.*

Green sighed. *"So are we going to talk about your history or keep—?"*

Sure. You go first.

"*...I walked into that one."*

*You **ran** into that one at Mach-5.*

Green wisely dropped the subject.

White didn't.

"*You don't have to worry."* he blurted, and Hawks suspected the thought had literally not been meant to be shared.

Hawks paused. *Hmm?*

"*I said you don't have to worry. You aren't like them and you never will be."* White said fiercely. *"You want to help u— students grow, not force them to become Heroes."*

Hawks ducked his head and frowned, wishing he had his costume's high collar. *You don't know that.*

"*We're in your head, dumbass."* Orange groaned. *"Now stop being so annoyingly self-deprecating or else."*

Or else what? Hawks teased. *You'll swear at me?*

Orange let loose a barrage of colorful language.

Hawks winced but managed to push the headache to the back of his mind. It came back ten times as bad as he exited the door into a storm of camera flashes.

"Hawks, where were you for the past year?"

"Hawks! Hawks, over here!"

"How bad were your injuries?"

"Hawks!"

"Were you captured by a Villain?"

"Over here, Hawks!"

"What are your thoughts about the Heroes' almost declaring you dead?"

"Ingenium and Miruko were seen leaving this hospital. What's your relationship with them?"

"Hawks, a question?"

"Do you know who has been running your agency in your absence? Rumor has it that—"

"What do you think of Miruko's rise in rank?"

The barrage of questions was almost too much, but after dealing with eight voices in his head, Hawks could comprehend each one. He categorized each one into remember, answer, or ignore. He did not need to fake a smile as he looked into one of the cameras.

"Miruko rose in rank? Awesome! I have to congratulate her. As for my relationship with her and Ingenium, we're just friends. I was just admitted into the hospital for general exhaustion but now I'm good as new." He ignored the grey that stained his wings and the pending diagnoses he had glimpsed on the nurse's clipboard this morning. "I guess the sidekicks at my agency stepped it up while I was gone. I'm proud of them."

The reporters shouted over each other as they asked more questions. A car pulled up behind them and Hawks forced his smile to stay in place. He recognized the man that got out as one

of the Commission's workers.

"*For fuck's sake...*" Orange snarled. *"Do they have a tracker in you or something?"*

If they did they would have found us in the woods, Hawks thought without humor. *They've probably hacked the hospital cameras.*

"*Stalkers."* Yellow muttered.

It's how they show they care, Hawks told him sarcastically.

"*Like stalkers."*

"Hawks?"

Hawks returned to the outside world, keeping his expression neutral as he tried to gauge how long he had been out of it. He spotted Ingenium— when had he gotten there?— surrounded by a crowd of most of the throng of reporters that had been around him. The other reporters were being herded back by security and the Commission man was in front of him. So was an angry-looking Miruko.

Crap. When did she get there?

The babble of responses became stifled as the voices struggled to not distract him.

"—so nice of them to send a driver." Miruko was saying sweetly. "Now, where do you want to take him, exactly?"

The Commission agent's lips were pressed together so thinly the skin around them were white. "I'm simply here to drive Hawks to his agency, ma'am."

"Great." Miruko said with fake pleasantry. "We can all go together."

They got into the car, with both Hawks and Miruko sitting in the back. She settled in a slouched position so her knees dug into the back of the driver's seat. Hawks did *not* spend the ride panicking as he wondered what conversation he had missed while drifting. He most certainly did not.

Luckily, not a single turn was out of place and they soon pulled up to Hawks's agency. He knew it was only because Miruko was there. And the not so minor detail that she might have restrained the driver if he took a wrong turn, because if they strayed from their route she *definitely* had reason to believe the driver was malignant since he was taking them to places unknown. *Truly*. Hawks had already gone missing once, so she was being extra wary.

Hawks watched the Commission driver pull away and ignored the headache his head's occupants were causing him. Seriously, them trying *not* to blurt out questions was almost worse than them shouting their queries all at once. Probably because his head literally felt like it was going to burst. He put a hand to his head.

Getting a little loud, guys.

A chorus of apologies— and a less pleasant response from Orange— assaulted his senses.

He winced. “Thanks for the help, Rumi.”

“No problem. It’s a good thing I was there too. You kinda zoned out before he approached you but Ingenium distracted the reporters before they could see.” Sharp red eyes pierced him, still simmering with anger. “Still, I guess the media has it’s uses. If they weren’t there the Commission boy probably would’ve grabbed your arm and dragged you to the car.”

Hawks repressed a grimace and ignored Orange’s snide comment that yeah, they were *totally* ready to return to Hero work like this.

Thankfully Miruko did not confront him about his lack of awareness. She flipped her hair over her shoulder. “Now as much as I want to see Mockingjay’s emotionally stunted attempt to say she’s glad you’re alive, I need to go. I have a stupid photo shoot to get to.”

“You came all the way to Hosu just to get me from the hospital?” Hawks asked, surprised.

Miruko shot him a look that suggested she was questioning his intelligence. “Duh.”

Hawks tucked his chin and once again wished he had his costume to hide his smile. “Thanks. Again.” He scratched his cheek awkwardly. “You’re being awfully helpful…”

An odd expression crossed Miruko’s face but it vanished before he could decipher it. “Get used to it.”

She sprinted away before he could think of a response.

Once he was sure she was gone, Hawks shook his head and took a deep breath. *You’ve been great about being pretty quiet so let’s try to keep that up until I reach my office, okay?*

“*We’re so gonna fail. We’ll do our best to keep you comfort—! What the fuck does that mean —? Stay quiet stay quiet stay quiet annndd we’re failing. We’re hurting him. Come on,* ***don’t think****— Oh dear. Now that’s he’s talking to us of course we’re going to respond all at once and* [illegible]*—*”

They had been doing *so well*.

Hawks bit his lip and rubbed at his eyes, hoping they would not do more than prickle from the pain. The last thing he needed was to come into his agency looking like even more of a wreck. He focused on the feeling of his shirt against his skin and the firmness of the ground under his feet, trying to keep himself grounded. “Grounded”, haha. The desire to beg Purple to help the others be quiet *might* be there but Hawks could barely tell which thoughts were his own. So he focused on the simple task of taking one step after the other until he crossed the threshold into his agency.

A familiar sight waited for him and he felt his mind clear as he stepped foot into his agency for the first time in a year. It was as if he had never left. The receptionist’s desk was still covered with papers, the lights still flickered on occasion, and the coffee stain still poked out

from behind a picture frame from where a sidekick had tripped and spilled it. This place felt much more like home than his dingy apartment did, probably because he spent most of his nights here. Which might be a good thing considering he might have lost his apartment after being missing for a year—

Don't think about it. Calm down.

Was that his thoughts or one of the voices?

Calmmmmm.

Hawks held himself together and did not freak out or drift in the foyer of his agency. A double win in his books.

An olive-skinned woman in her mid-twenties stood waiting for him, dressed in simple black body armor with her face-covering mask pushed up and her dark hair in a long braid. A lightweight chest plate covered her torso and guards shielded her forearms, matching the black bow and quiver that were slung over her back. A golden emblem in the shape of a bird was the only splash of color on her outfit, placed over her heart. Upon seeing him, grey eyes narrowed.

"Hi, Katniss." Hawks said brightly. "Long time, no see."

She stepped closer to him and slowly looked him over. He let her study him, not bothering to try to hide how exhausted he was. Her fingers twitched, and Hawks knew she was itching to shoot something. Or someone. Or many someones.

"You should still be in the hospital." she stated.

"So I've heard." Hawks joked. "I also heard you kept the Kettle running in my absence."

"You heard nothing of the sort." Mockingjay said blandly. She stepped closer and scanned his face. "You're in pain. I can hear it in your voice."

Hawks should have known he would not be able to hide it. If anyone could hear how he strained to keep his voice level, it would be her. "Just a headache."

"Hmm." Mockingjay said, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. "Go to your office and rest. You won't help anyone if you collapse on the job." She turned on her heel, braid flicking in the air. "...Thank you for keeping your promise."

She walked off before Hawks could reply and he began to wonder if the people in his life had issues with 'goodbyes'. Then he remembered that he had just returned from being missing for a year and that *might* have something to do with it.

His throat closed up. *Shit.*

"*Need help?"* Purple asked.

Yes.

“*Act normally until you get to your office.”* Purple commanded.

Hawks felt his body relax and he walked.

He smiled and nodded to Heroes and sidekicks as he passed, making his way upstairs.

He entered his office and distantly noted it was cleaner than it used to be, with no papers on the desk.

He sat at his desk.

He stifled a pained groan and put his head in his hands.

We really need to figure out how to deal with this.

“*You could have Purple put us on mute?”* Green said.

“*I’d agree to that.”* Pink seconded.

“*Same.”* Yellow added.

No. Hawks stated before the others could voice their assent. *Let me rephrase. We really need to figure out how to deal with this* ***without*** *spamming Purple’s Quirk.*

“*How?”* Red questioned. *“We can’t stop thinking unless he orders us to. Even if we try to keep quiet we slip through—”*

“*Ooo that picture’s so pretty!”* Pink squealed.

“*Who has a picture of a flower in their Hero office?”* Orange scoffed.

“*It’s such a vibrant blue. I approve.”* Silver said.

“*We’re so high up!”* Yellow gasped.

“*Focus, guys.”* Green begged.

~~Anonymance/shame/anger-guilt-apology~~ blurred together.

Hawks blinked, looked at the clock, and saw he had been drifting for five minutes. He planted his forehead on his desk.

“*...Like that.”* Red finished wearily.

“*At this rate we’re going to get us killed.”* White said quietly.

Disconcerted acknowledgment rippled through the voices.

Hawks kept his head firmly planted on the nice, cool wood of the desk. *Do any of you have any mental Quirks that could help us deal with this?*

He got a series of "*No'*s" in response.

"*Maybe some type of mental training could help?"* Green mentioned. *"Like meditation or something?"*

"*Oh yes, I'm sure some good old Yin bullshit will solve all our problems."* Orange snarled.

"*Orange, I get you're frustrated with being stuck in here but you're* ***not*** *helping."* Pink snapped.

Orange's shock-turned-anger tore through them like a tidal wave and Hawks struggled not to vomit.

New subject, he begged as his thoughts began to fracture. ***Calm*** *subject.*

Half the voices scrambled for a new and less argumentative topic while the others chanted *"Don't think calm down don't think calm down* ~~calm down~~*"* Hawks appreciated the effort but it was really not working. Why couldn't this work like most mental Quirks where communication could be cut off?

"*Uhhhhh Mockingjay!"* Yellow blurted. *"She's pretty cool."*

Silver latched onto the topic like his sanity depended on it. Hawks could almost picture him physically clinging to it. *"Yes, she must be quite skilled to keep your agency running in your absence."*

"*I've never heard of Mockingjay."* Green sounded disconcerted about that fact, as if he had failed some important task.

She's an Underground Hero, Hawks reminded him.

"*But she works for you agency?"* Pink questioned.

Hawks stopped himself from nodding. *Yeah. We kept her recruitment out of the media at her request. She deals with stuff that doesn't make the news. Undercover work, Quirk trafficking, conspiracies. Things I can't usually do until it's time for the takedown.*

"*What do you mean?"* Green asked.

Hawks fiddled with the collar of his shirt, wishing it was higher. *Green, do I need to remind you I'm a popular and well-known Hero? If I tried to go undercover I'd be recognized in a microsecond unless I ditched my wings, and then I'd be mostly without my Quirk. I can't get close to enemy factions without making them retreat into the shadows. Sure, I could pretend to be dirty, but I doubt I could fool any Villains for long.*

"*You should give yourself more credit. I think you would do splendidly."* Red said. She recoiled as if recalling something unpleasant.

Before her thoughts could become coherent, Green started loudly rambling about some of the gang take-downs he had heard of, distracting them all— including Red. Hawks tried to make

note of her reaction but knew he would have little success doing anything with it if the voices worked against him to keep their secrets.

Thanks for the vote of confidence. But undercover work is more Mockingjay's thing than mine.

Pink hummed vaguely but Hawks could sense her curiosity. *"She seems… reserved."*

Her story isn't mine to share, Hawks said firmly.

"*Can you at least tell us what Quirk she has?"* Yellow asked hopefully.

Hawks started going through verses of *The Raven*.

In Spanish, a language he was a bit rusty on. It took a lot of concentration.

"*No fair."*

Hey, you're the ones trying to read my thoughts without permission.

"*True."* Yellow huffed. *"But it's not like we have a choice."*

Not going down that rabbit hole again, Hawks thought tersely. He knew they heard him.

He opened one of the drawers on his desk and rummaged through them. He found a bottle of aspirin— likely expired— but cared little about that. He swallowed it dry and planted his head back on the table as the voices whispered that this wasn't working and they would get nothing done like this—

"*What promise was she talking about?"* Pink blurted.

Similar to White earlier, Hawks knew she did not mean to ask the question. This time he had no problem with giving a response, simply because he wanted to know their reactions.

That I wouldn't die.

Green started rambling about the usages of support gear.

Orange swore at him.

Silver loudly told them to stop arguing though he noted Orange was once again the aggressor but still Green should know how to deal with Orange's attitude by now.

Orange started swearing at Silver.

Purple focused on the pictures on the walls, taking in every detail with Hawks's sharp eyes.

Red listed the elements of the periodic table.

Their attempts failed to fully hide the *guilt-sorrow-horror-shame* from Pink and Yellow, *guilt-horror* that all of them wanted to deny.

Hawks wished they would just tell him how he died.

XXXXXXX

The excited babble of his classmates washed over Shoto Todoroki as they discussed their upcoming internships with Hero Agencies. He distantly listened as Ashido lamented over her lack of offers while Midoriya muttered to himself about the different specialties of the forty agencies available to those who got no other agencies interested in them. Todoroki had been planning to go to his father's agency to learn how to use his left side yet he found his gaze kept drifting away from Endeavor's Hero Agency to another on his list.

Todoroki did not know much about the Number Three Hero Hawks. He knew he had wings, was shockingly young to be so highly ranked, and he had just returned from going missing for just over a year. Loathe as Todoroki was to admit it, it was that last point that made him hesitate to accept his father's internship offer. No information had been given about where he had been or what happened to him, not for lack of trying on the news' part. Hawks had returned to work as if nothing had happened and quickly reaffirmed that he was indeed the Number Three Hero for a reason after completing more than a hundred missions and rescues in a day.

Indeed, Hawks' prominence in the news was part of the reason Todoroki hesitated to accept Endeavor's offer, though it was not just because of the mystery surrounding him. For the first time, Todoroki started wondering who the Number Three Hero was. What were his specialties when it came to Hero work? What were his morals? Did he prioritize civilian safety or his image? What kind of Hero was he?

Luckily Todoroki had an expert to ask. He sat down next to Midoriya, interrupting his muttering.

"Midoriya? What do you know about Hawks?"

Midoriya's mouth dropped open. "You got an offer from *Hawks*? He's never taken interns before. But this year he sent offers to three..."

Todoroki waited patiently for Midoriya to stop muttering about the possible reasons for that change and return to the topic at hand.

He did not have to wait long as Midoriya jolted in his seat. "Oh, right. Your question. Hawks is primarily a rescue and assistance Hero. He takes down big criminal operations but also saves cats from trees and helps old ladies with their groceries." Seeing Todoroki's perplexed expression, Midoriya raised his hands defensively. "I'm not even joking. He can manipulate each of his feathers telekinetically and uses them to help people or evacuate civilians from dangerous areas. He's also pretty good in a fight— he uses his feathers as throwing knives and swords!— but he's not a powerhouse like All Might or..." Midoriya froze in place, fidgeting uncomfortably.

"Endeavor." Todoroki finished evenly.

Midoriya winced. “Right. Him.” He hesitated and shifted in his seat. “Do you want my honest advice?”

“That is why I came to you.” Todoroki told him bluntly.

Midoriya’s cheeks reddened and he ducked his head. “Right. I say if you want to work on your left side, go to Endeavor. But if you want to work on things other than your Quirk— like maybe helping people and knowing how to make them feel safe?— go to Hawks.”

Todoroki considered his words carefully. Power had always been Endeavor’s priority when training his son, even when Todoroki refused to use his left side. He wanted to create a Hero stronger than All Might, and although Todoroki hated that goal, he never really thought about what else being a Hero entailed. Until recently, during his fight with Midoriya. Midoriya, who sacrificed his chances to win the Sports Festival in order to help his then-rival. Endeavor would never do such a thing.

Would Shoto sacrifice personal victory to help someone?

He was not sure, but he knew he would not find that answer at the Endeavor Hero Agency.

I may use his power, but I will not be my father. I will be better.

“Thank you, Midoriya. Your advice has been a great help.”

Todoroki bowed and bade his retreat without acknowledging Midoriya’s flustered “You’re welcome.” He watched Uraraka and Iida crowd around Midoriya as they further discussed their options, though he noticed Iida was glancing his way. Had he overheard the conversation? It would not be difficult.

Todoroki considered his long list of offers again, pen moving down the page and past Endeavor’s agency. He did not need to intern with Endeavor to learn to use his left side, so he may as well use this opportunity to learn other skills.

His pen touched the page and he circled Hawks Hero Agency.

Chapter End Notes

This was originally two chapters but I combined it into one just cause. So now it’s nearly 12,000 words… Oops?

And yes, Mockingjay is Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games. No, she’s not an expy, she’s Katniss fitted into the MHA world because why not? I have a one shot written that details her MHA-verse backstory and how she met Hawks (because seriously there needs to be more Hunger Games crossovers that aren’t “characters from X franchise in a Hunger Games scenario”). It won’t be required reading, it just gives

some context as to who Katniss is in this universe. It does spoil Mockingjay's backstory and Quirk though so I'm not sure when I want to post it. I guess it depends on interest.

(And now, a brief glimpse into the thoughts of the author...
Past Me: *looks at canon* There's something I want to do in the future but I need you to do a Thing for me. Could you do that?
Canon: *does the Thing*
Present Me: :D :D :D
In other words, yes, we now know Hawks' canon name (About time). And yes, it will be a part of things later. I was hoping they'd release it before I got to writing a certain something and they did it.)

IMPORTANT NOTE (Help!): Okay, so this fic has fanart but I can't seem to figure out how to insert it into the chapter (Chapter 2). I've tried again and again but it just won't work. Can anyone help me?

Bully

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Three?"

"Yes."

"...*All* three?"

"Yes."

"*All three* accepted?"

"*Yes*. They'll be coming in a couple days."

Hawks slouched in his chair and stared at Mockingjay in befuddlement. His perplexed state of mind mixed with that of the eight voices and they united in shared bewilderment— and in some cases, unease. It was not quite a coherent feeling, but Hawks knew what they were all thinking: *"This didn't happen last time."*

"I didn't expect this. I thought one or *maybe* two but not all three. I mean, Tenya Iida was a gamble because I'm sure Ingenium's agency sent him an offer but…" He trailed off with a frown.

Mockingjay deftly flipped through the filled out acceptance forms and stopped on the third before setting them all down. "Let me guess. You didn't think you'd snag Shoto Todoroki."

"Not really. I thought his father would have sent him an offer."

She leaned against his desk, arms crossed and hands cupped tightly around her elbows. "Endeavor probably did."

Hawks shivered as the voices' unease multiplied, sending jolting aches through his head. He gritted his teeth but molded his lips into a clenched smile. *Guess I'm more popular than I thought.*

Mockingjay's brow wrinkled. "Your lips moved but you weren't speaking."

"Sor...ry..." Hawks said, making sure to feel the word vibrate in his throat. "That happens sometimes."

Mockingjay's grey eyes narrowed but she did not confront him. "Since you're going to have interns should probably *teach* them."

"I was planning to." Hawks protested.

“That means no flying off any leaving them with the sidekicks the whole time.”

“I wasn’t going to.” Hawks huffed. He did *not* pout because he was a mature adult.

“Right.” Mockingjay said flatly. “I definitely believe you. Just like I believe you’re not going to sleep on the office couch *again* tonight.”

Hawks gave up on not pouting and promptly pouted at her. “I’ve been busy.”

It was the truth. After their failed attempt to figure out a better way to keep their shared head organized, Hawks and the voices had gone out to stop as many crimes as they could, acting like they had never gone missing. They still had to rely on Purple’s Quirk in order to function, but at least they were back out doing Hero work so the Hero Commission could not complain. Complain more than usual, anyway. Hawks also conveniently did not stay in one place too long so the Commission could not drag him in for interrogation without physically pulling him away from a crime he was dealing with. Or without making the public panic if he ‘vanished’ again.

Unfortunately, he was burning himself out. Purple was exhausted too, and even his thoughts were quieter and more sluggish than normal, as if he had strained his voice. Hawks and the others felt more than a little guilty and he could hear Green and Red brainstorming alternatives in the back of his mind.

He blinked and Mockingjay was snapping her fingers in front of his face. She frowned at him.

“You… ‘drifted’.” Her lips twisted unhappily.

“And you talked to Rumi.” Hawks sighed. “Do I need to stop the two of you from conspiring to take down Hero Society?”

“...No.”

“You had to think about it. That is not comforting.”

“I’m not a comforting type of person.” She walked over to the closet of spare clothes and pulled an outfit out before slamming it down on top of his piles of paperwork. “You. Change. Go home. Sleep.”

“Me. Need to work. No breaks.” Hawks shot back.

“No. I’m not letting you work yourself to death after we just got you back. You are taking a break.”

The look on her face told Hawks that if he protested he’d find himself breathing in some sleeping gas from one of her arrows.

He begrudgingly headed to the bathroom and peeled off his costume. Looking at it, he realized it was kind of dirty. He did not mind, but of course he— the ‘*oh-so-popular’* and ‘*fashionable’* Winged Hero— had to look *‘perfect’* or the news would conspire and claim he

was on the verge of a mental breakdown. Well, he *was* on the verge of a mental breakdown but the point was not to share that with the media. He dropped his costume in the laundry bin, thankful it was machine washable. When he walked back out in civilian clothes— simple jeans, t-shirt, and a jacket, thank you Katniss— Mockingjay was glowering at her phone.

“Speak of the Devil...” Her scowl deepened. "Endeavor is here to see you."

Hawks hummed, processed what she said, and did a double take. "Really?"

Whenever Endeavor demanded a meeting— which was rare since the Number Two and Number Three Heroes rarely teamed up— he usually commanded Hawks come to his Agency. Whatever he wanted must be important for him to come here. Hawks hoped nothing was wrong.

"No. I just said that for no reason." Mockingjay intoned flatly.

Hawks put on his most mock-pained expression, complete with a dramatic hand to his heart. “The sarcasm, it *hurts*.” He dropped his hands from his chest and cocked his head quizzically to the side. “Are you *sure* you aren’t ‘Lady Sarcasm, the Sarcastic Hero’?”

“I considered that epithet but decided it was too on the nose.” Mockingjay said blandly. Her grey eyes narrowed and her fingers twitched. “If Endeavor causes trouble, call.”

“I’m not going to let you shoot him.” Hawks sighed.

“I wouldn’t.” Mockingjay claimed, straight faced.

Hawks rolled his eyes and told the receptionist he was heading down. It was really weird that Endeavor did not want to meet up here in Hawks’s office but he would be heading out soon anyway. The elevator ride down left him with only his thoughts and he rubbed his forehead tiredly.

*I know I keep saying this, but could you **relax** ?*

“*Trying. Failing. Sorry.”* Someone— maybe Pink?— grunted.

Their nerves made Hawks feel jittery and he rubbed his arms. Ugh, it felt like *bugs* were crawling in his skin.

“*Why doesn’t Mockingjay like Endeavor?”* Green blurted. Hawks could not tell whether he accidentally asked or was that desperate to distract himself.

Katniss hates his attitude. She’s not very friendly with most people but even she thinks Endeavor is a grump.

White retreated so far into the background Hawks could not feel his emotions. Before he could ask how he managed that, Green cleared his throat.

“*What about you? How do you feel about him?”*

Hawks let his thoughts flow, not bothering to try to stop them. *I haven't worked with him much but I was a big fan as a kid. My family was poor so his merch was the only stuff I could afford. I admit I grew attached, especially since the Commission kept trying to mold me into being the next All Might. All Might's cool but he seems too far out of reach, you know? Like a star. Or the sun. I'll never be good enough—* Hawks shook his melancholy away. *Anyway, All Might was impossible to surpass. I think Endeavor knows that, but he kept trying anyway. He had a* ***choice*** *and he refused to give up. I wish I had that freedo— conviction. Nowadays I'm still a fan of Endeavor but I know he has a huge stick up his ass. He's so easy to rile up. One time I joked about his flame beard at a party and he nearly set the buffet table on fire! I still respect that he's the only one who tried to surpass All Might though. Everyone else just settled and accepted they never could, so they didn't even try. All Might is on a pedestal too high for anyone else to reach. I think that'll bite Society in the tail feathers someday...*

"*You're a prophet."* Orange muttered.

Hawks's steps slowed. *Please don't tell me we need to somehow replace All Might. I don't think his shoes can be filled...*

"*We have a candidate but he won't be ready for a few years."* Silver said slowly.

"*He's not a replacement, he's* ***better*** *than All Might*." Orange corrected in a growl.

Green stammered something indecipherable. If he had a body his face would be bright red.

Hawks sighed. *You guys are the opposite of subtle.*

Endeavor was waiting for him in one of the empty side rooms that branched off from the lobby. Hawks took a moment to scan the Flame Hero as he entered, taking in everything from his posture to his expression.

All of which just so happened to scream '*pissed*'.

It may be hard to differentiate that from his normal death-glare expression but Hawks could tell in the way the muscles in his neck looked on the verge of bursting.

Endeavor spotted Hawks and stormed up to him. "Is this your idea of a joke?"

The voices shifted uneasily. Hawks ignored them.

"Hello to you too." he said brightly. "While I do love making light of things, this time I have no clue what's got your flame-beard in a twist."

Yellow muffled a snort. His amusement was not enough to swamp the others' tension. In fact, it failed to even dent it.

Endeavor was not amused. As usual. "You offered my son an internship."

Why did he say that like Hawks had declared war, committed treason, and tried to blow up a city all at once? "Yeah. A lot of agencies did."

Icy blue eyes narrowed and Endeavor stepped closer so he loomed over Hawks. “And yet he chose *yours*.”

Someone else may have been intimidated by Endeavor’s expression and massive height, but Hawks was not someone else. He put his hands in his pockets and wished he had kept his costume on. Endeavor had little respect or patience for ‘that childish, irreverent, lazy, rude upstart’ but he tended to act a little more personable—at least, Hawks liked to *think* he did—if Hawks was in costume. Ugh, he felt so exposed without his collar.

The garbled murmurs of the voices were not helping his concentration any.

“*Don’t say the wrong thing please be careful ~~We can't get Shoto in trouble—~~*”

Hawks bit back a wince of pain as their thoughts became an indecipherable jumble of nerves — and protective anger?

“Rescind your offer.”

Hawks had to take a moment to pause and realize it was Endeavor that spoke. It took another minute for him to process the demand because *what?* “…Excuse me?”

“Shoto has finally used my Quirk.” Endeavor stated. “He will be training with me to control his left side.”

“I think if he wanted to do that he would have accepted your internship offer.” Hawks said carefully. “He must want to learn some other skills from me.”

“Are you insinuating my teaching abilities are sub-par?” Endeavor growled.

When it comes to being nice and comforting? Probably. I mean you ***are*** *one of the least sociable Pro Heroes… The permanent death glare’s a big issue.* Hawks wisely kept his jokes to himself and raised his hands in a placating motion.“Of course not. I’m just saying he’s probably trying new things. Making new connections. I know you’re a loner-type Hero but he doesn’t have to be.”

Endeavor’s lips were so thin Hawks was surprised they did not vanish. “That is not your decision to make.”

Green made a disgusted noise. *“You know, I forgot how awful Endeavor used to be.”*

“*Just call him an asshole, Green.”* Orange growled, but something was *off* about his tone. He sounded… almost *uncomfortable*? *“I’ve heard you swear. You can do it.”*

Outside of his head, Hawks had enough of this little chat with Endeavor. The voices were on the verge of panicking, he had a headache, he wanted to go home, and honestly this conversation should *not* be happening.

“You’re right. It’s not my decision. *Or* yours. It’s *his*.” He softened his expression. “Look, Enji, I know you want to spend time with your kid, and I respect you for that, but I’m not

budging. This is Shoto's choice and I'm not taking that from him." He turned towards the door. "Now if you'll excuse me, I haven't been home in over a year and I'd like to—"

"***Turn!****"* Green shouted.

He spun on instinct and a burning hot hand latched around his throat.

Hawks' consciousness *jerked* and his right hand grabbed Endeavor's, twisting it and yanking it away from his scalding flesh.

His *hand*, because *he didn't do that.*

"Don't touch me."

It was his voice using his mouth but he was *not* the one who spoke. Hawks could feel his body but it felt *wrong*, as if his soul had been shoved too deeply into his flesh. His right wing felt cold. His left felt hot. Hawks wanted to make sure it was not on fire but he could not move his head. *He was not in control.*

Endeavor jerked back and Hawks caught a glimpse of the startled expression on his face before it returned to its normal, sharp glare.

"I only meant to grab your shoulder." he said stiffly. "You moved."

"So it's my fault you *burned me* then?" Hawks's body hissed.

His right hand felt *cold-cold-cold* and he swore Endeavor winced. His body abruptly released the Flame Hero's wrist.

"I don't want to hear your excuses. *Leave*." It took such strain to force the last word from Hawks's throat it felt like he was trying to cough up a spike-covered stone.

To his credit, Endeavor backed down, turning on his heel and storming out. Hawks felt no victory, only *panic-horror-**whathavewedone**?*

Something in his head *twisted* and Hawks jolted back into his body. He watched his hands tremble and slowly flexed his fingers to reassure himself he could. Then he immediately collapsed to the floor, clutching at his head as he rocked back and forth.

You can take control. You can take control. ***Youcantakecontrolyoucan—***

"*I couldn't let him hurt you."* White whispered.

The soft, shaky, but genuine admission was enough to snap Hawks out of his panic. He shelved it to be dealt with at a later, more private time. Not that he would *ever* have privacy since he had eight voices in his head who could *take control of his body* if they really wanted to—

Not thinking about that ***calmdown*** .

Hawks wanted to deny that Endeavor meant him harm but even thinking that at White felt *wrong*, like he may as well punch White in the face while he was at it. He gingerly touched his throat and winced.

He left a mark.

"*He left a **burn**."* Red fretted. *"Here, let me make some salve…"* She trailed off as she remembered her situation.

"*I can't believe he burned you—"* Green paused and his voice became flat. *"Wait, yes I can."*

Hawks was not sure how he felt about that. *He looked shocked. I don't think he meant to grab me like that—*

"***Don't** defend him."* White snapped and Hawks flinched at his harsh tone.

"*Even if he intended to only grab your shirt, his hand was burning..."* Pink murmured.

"*Has he done this before?"* Purple asked cautiously.

The question acted like a switch and all eight voices focused purely on Hawks. Having the absolute and complete attention of eight people at once was nothing new, but it was disconcerting to have that attention from inside his own head, where he had less of a chance of hiding his true thoughts.

He sometimes tries being physically intimidating when he thinks I'm doing something arrogant or 'unbecoming of a Hero' but he usually only grabs me and gives me a shake when he's super pissed, Hawks told them straight up. *Most times I can get him to back off by mocking him or showing him how over-reactionary he's being.*

Orange became noticeably silent and withdrawn, his presence shrinking like a dying sun.

"*Hawks, intimidating your coworker like that isn't normal."* Silver said gravely.

Oh, I know. But usually he's just trying to tell me I've gone too far. I know I joke about riling him up but it's pretty hard to push his buttons. Besides, Endeavor is a naturally intimidating guy. If he tried smiling like All Might I think the world might end— Er, that might've been a tasteless joke. Sorry about that.

"*It's fine."* Pink assured him but Hawks could feel her discomfort. Said discomfort was not directed at his 'tasteless joke' but rather Endeavor.

He rubbed his forehead. *He's a drama queen but deep down I think he likes me. Really deep down. Under layers of annoyance. And like I said, he rarely gets physical. As in 'once in a blue moon' rarely.*

"*He shouldn't 'get physical' at all."* Silver said tersely.

"*Wait, he **shakes** you?"* Yellow demanded belatedly. Was he a bit slow on the uptake or had the others' thoughts distracted him?

Hawks reluctantly answered. *Usually by the front of my costume.*

He remembered the time he became the Number Three Hero and gave a rather sarcastic acceptance speech at the rankings. Endeavor had not been pleased to have a snot-nosed brat show such disrespect towards his new position and had corned him backstage. Even at eighteen Hawks had been less than inclined to adhere to the hierarchy and had cheerfully told Endeavor he was a fan while his feet were almost a foot off the ground— and that was not because of his wings.

I got some burn marks a few times so I had to replace it. Good thing I have spares.

His joke failed to prevent an explosion of protests and anger. It turned his vision white and he planted his hands over his aching eyes.

"*How can he just—?"*

"*Of course he pulls stuff like this—"*

"*Not even surprised he—"*

"*How does no one—?"*

"*Should report—"*

"*They have to know that—"*

"*Bet the reports get swept under the rug just like—"*

Hawks managed to decipher and process some of the garbled thoughts. *Whoa whoa whoa! Calm down! Why are all of you acting like he's some—* He faltered. *—bully?*

"*Because he **is** a bully."* Orange exploded. *"He's a fucking bully and you're letting him walk all over you! Heroes don't fucking activate their Quirk and grab people! His behavior would get him fired or arrested if he wasn't so valuable to Hero Society. Do you really think intimidating your coworkers is normal? Do you **really** think he's a good man or did the Commission's brainwashing scramble your brains so badly you can't see Endeavor's **fucked up**?"*

White retreated so quickly that Hawks felt a physical lurch in his head. The others started distracting themselves with whatever they could. Hawks gave up on trying to remain seated and laid down, planting his forehead on the nice, cold tile floor.

I'm not blind to Endeavor's faults. But I... Hawks braced himself. *I still think you're overreacting.* He pushed through the wave of anger and indignation sent his way. *Encounters like today are really rare. Like, really **really** rare. Endeavor has not burned me like this before today, and today was an **accident**. He meant to grab me, sure, but not by the **neck**. He just thinks I'm being disrespectful. If he really wanted to hurt me he could do much worse—*

"*Let me guess."* Orange snarled. *"Did the Commission beat you for 'being disrespectful' so you think this is fucking **normal**? It's not okay! It's never okay! He's a **monster** and you*

*should **never** forgive him!"*

Hawks's anger mixed with Orange's and his wings stung. The scent of nitroglycerin tickled his nose—

"*That's not it."* Green interjected softly, his gentle tone smothering their rage. *"He's probably jealous that a 'lazy, disrespectful brat' got to the Top Ten quicker and is more popular than him. Not to mention… he…"* Green's attention flicked to White and away. *"…He probably would rather see one of his children where Hawks is. His… older ones are around your age.*" There was something distinctly *off* in the way he said those words. Yet another secret Hawks was not privy to. *"He **can** change for the better though."*

Hawks had more than a sneaking suspicion Green was *not* talking about Endeavor in that last sentence. In fact, although Green spoke as if he defended Endeavor, his emotions betrayed him and told Hawks he was saying those things to try to appease *Hawks*, like a parent tried to downplay a tragedy in order to not frighten their child. The undeniable feeling of being left out of the loop grew from an inkling to an overwhelming fact.

What are you hiding from me? Hawks demanded.

The voices stubbornly united in a mantra of *"Don't think don't think we are not sharing without— Don't think."*

Hawks wanted to press but hesitated, ill at ease due to the sense that if he went down this rabbit hole, he would not emerge the same person.

He must have drifted because when he blinked, Miruko and Mockingjay were leaning over him. Miruko had her phone out, though she lowered it when he looked at her. Had she been ready to call the hospital? Well, that wasn't good. He'd better stop her.

Hawks forced a smile. *Hey. Did you know this floor is really comfortable?*

"Out loud, Hawks." Miruko said quietly.

"The floor is comfy." Hawks said out loud.

The two Heroes gave him near-identical looks of incredulity before Mockingjay's sharp grey eyes snapped to his neck.

"Are those *burns*?"

"Er. No?" Hawks sat up and pulled at his collar but Miruko smacked his hand away.

She carefully tipped his chin up and her expression changed from 'worried' to 'murderous'. "You need to report this."

Hawks opened his mouth to brush off her demand but a bubble of muted grief stopped him. He identified its source as White.

"*Don't bother.*" he said hollowly. *"They won't do anything."*

“They won’t do anything?”

Both Miruko and Mockingjay’s faces twisted into snarls and Hawks realized he had spoken aloud. Oops.

He put a hand over his aching eyes and smiled reassuringly. “Look, I’m fine. I just want to go home. I’ve been gone for a year, and these past couple days I’ve so busy hero-ing I haven’t…” Hawks peeked through his fingers and noticed Miruko’s blank face. His smile faltered. “…Do I still have a home to go to?”

Miruko’s fingers clenched so tightly her knuckles turned white. “You can live with me. I have your stuff already.”

Translation: the Commission gave me up for dead and dropped the lease for my apartment. Too bad they didn’t shred my contracts too.

“What.” Mockingjay said flatly, and Hawks realized she had not known about his homelessness.

He was *homeless*.

“Yay, we get to be roommates!” Hawks interjected quickly, and although he did it in part to avoid a possible bloodbath and ignore his recent revelation, his enthusiasm was real. “Important question: how do you put your toilet paper on the roll because according to All Might there is a correct way and a villainous way—”

Miruko jabbed him lightly in the shoulder. “Let’s take care of that burn and then we can go.”

Her tone informed him that no, she was *not* going to forget what Endeavor had done. Hawks wished she’d let it go because really, it was an accident, but knew she would report what had happened. Mockingjay might even pass on the footage of the room to give to whoever investigated— if anyone did— but nothing would come of it.

The voices knew that too. In fact, there was no doubt in their minds that this incident would be tossed aside and forgotten.

If you aren’t going to tell me, I’m going to find out on my own.

The voices were silent.

Hawks had a *really* bad feeling he wasn't going to like what he found.

XXXXXXX

Hawks thanked his lucky stars Miruko’s apartment was bigger than his had been. Her living quarters were not large by any definition of the word but it had luxuries he could not afford like a *couch*, which was all Hawks needed. He hadn't had much at his old place except clothes and some other items, which he found in one of Rumi's closets. Hawks pushed aside a box of shoes and rifled through some shirts, looking for something suitable to use as pajamas.

Seven of the voices offered varying opinions on his fashion choices, with Orange loudly rejecting the pineapple-covered shirt that looked like something a tourist would wear. Only White kept his opinion to himself. After the encounter with Endeavor, he had returned to his previous state of polite and quiet distance. Unfortunately, even he had no clue why or how he could retreat into Hawks' head. Or how he *took control of Hawks' body—*

Breathe.

Miruko leaned against the door jam behind him and crossed her arms. "I managed to get most of your stuff but the more fashionable items were confiscated."

"You mean the stuff worth two million yen the Commission let me 'borrow' that I'm supposed to wear to start fashion trends?" Hawks asked rhetorically. "What a shame. I really liked that red suit jacket. But it's not like I could've sold it to make some money…" The economic implications of being gone for a year slowly dawned on him and he bit his lip. "How badly am I in debt for the missed payments on my old apartment?"

"You're not. The Commission dropped your lease after four months. They've probably added some addendum to your contract though."

Hawks sighed, but was unsurprised. *My parents really did sell my life away.*

"What do you mean?" Pink questioned.

The answer went unwittingly through Hawks' thoughts without his permission. *They gave me to the Commission in exchange for 'financial security'. I never had a choice.*

Hawks' eyes prickled as waves of sorrowful compassion flared from Pink, who thought about her own parents who loved her so much and would never sell their child for all the money in the world. He should probably clarify that he wasn't *sold*. He was just… recruited young.

For money.

…It was *different*, okay?

"Hawks." He blinked at Miruko. "You drifted. It's been twenty minutes."

A look at the clock confirmed that was true. Hawks bit back an apology and pulled out an old pair of boxers. "Thanks for keeping my stuff."

"No problem. They were going to auction it off."

Hawks decided to ignore the little detail that they'd been willing to sell a 'dead' Hero's things to people and lifted the ragged shirt he'd chosen for pajamas. "Think I can sell this to the highest bidder? It smells like authentic Pro Hero mothballs."

Miruko took the shirt and dropped it on his head. "Be grateful for those Pro Hero mothballs. It helped keep mice out of your stuff."

Hawks removed the shirt from his face and nodded solemnly. "Thank you, oh mighty Pro Hero mothballs. I shall forever be in your debt."

Miruko threw a blanket at him, making sure it hit him in the face. "You're insufferable."

"It's part of my charm." Hawks busied himself with checking the blanket for holes. His feathers always managed to find them somehow if there were any. "Don't worry; you won't be stuck with me long. I'll get my own place again soon." He caught a glimpse of Miruko's pinched expression in his peripheral and shot her a questioning look.

She opened her mouth, closed it, and cleared her throat. "Hawks, you can stay here as long as you need."

"...And I am *not* liking that serious tone of yours. You've been showing you care way too much these past couple days." Hawks joked.

Miruko shot him an unhappy look. "Are we really just going to ignore your 'drifting'?"

Orange muttered something uncomplimentary and the others berated him. Hawks would have a better chance of flying to another galaxy than he would trying to decipher what they said. He blinked and they were sitting on the couch.

"Thirteen minutes." Miruko told him.

Hawks swallowed. "I can handle it at work. It won't affect my performance." *Sorry for relying so much on you, Purple.*

"I don't mind. I'm sure we'll figure out a better solution."

"You're doing it again." Miruko sighed.

"…Sorry." Hawks made sure he said the apology out loud.

He busied himself with putting his blanket on the couch and carefully smoothed out all the wrinkles in the fabric. Miruko settled in another chair and watched him.

"Seriously, you don't have to worry about me." Hawks insisted.

"Do I need to say how stupid that sentiment is?" Miruko asked flatly. "If I didn't worry I'd be a heartless bitch."

His— and the voices'— discomfort was rising. His throat tightened and he coughed to try to clear it. It didn't work very well. And was it getting hot in here? The walls seemed kinda close. He fanned himself with his hand and wiggled his leg. "Cool, cool-cool but could we just pretend nothing's wrong please?"

"…Fine." Miruko said in a tone that suggested that *no*, it was most certainly not fine.

In fact, *nothing* was fine because Hawks was technically homeless because he went missing for a year because he got eight people in his head who could take control of his body any

time they wanted to if they really wanted to and—

"*Calm down."* Purple croaked.

Hawks did not realize he and the others had been feeding off each others' panic until that order was given. He put his head in his hands and *breathed*.

"I hate my life." He raised a stalling hand before Miruko could reply. "I'll talk when I'm ready."

And the subject was dropped.

Hawks knew every fiber of Miruko's being was begging her to keep pushing for answers, but despite her confrontational attitude, she knew when to stop. He put on his makeshift pajamas, more uncomfortable with the thought of seeing his own body than he was at the thought of Miruko seeing it. She'd helped wash blood off himself too many times for him to feel self-conscious, not that he'd feel awkward about it anyway.

"I can't believe I lost my apartment but somehow managed to keep my rank." Hawks complained as he pulled on his shirt while carefully not looking down at his chest. "It's not fair. Why couldn't I fall at least *one* position? Just one?" An idea struck him and he brightened. "How about you and I switch? You can be Number Three and I'll be Five." He made a mental note to celebrate Miruko's promotion when he had the time. Hopefully he'd remember it.

"You know it doesn't work like that." Miruko said with bland sarcasm. "Sorry, but you're too popular. Even more so now that everyone's curious about where you've been. It gives you that *mysterious* aspect people go crazy over. Edgeshot will be jealous."

"Noooooooo…" Hawks whined. "Can't I do something wrong and decrease my rank? Rumi, quick! Give me a scandal idea!"

She smirked. "Nope. I like to see you suffer."

A knock on the door interrupted their banter.

Hawks glanced at the clock and noted the late hour. Miruko's surprised startle suggested she was not expecting a visitor and unfortunately, her door did not have a peep hole. Before Hawks could push past nine people's unease and *do something*, she had gotten up and walked over to the door. Hawks bit back a protest because *this wasn't the future where every door could hide an enemy. They weren't at war and being hunted down like animals—*

Miruko opened the door and froze.

Hawks shifted to the side, keeping out of sight of the doorway as he subtly sent out a feather to survey the newcomer. Before he could get more than the general gist of the large figure outside, a booming voice filled the room.

"I am here!"

Hawks was not prepared for the sudden and unexpected appearance of All Might.

He was even less prepared for the tornado of emotions from the voices.

Pain-guilt-grief-anger-regret-joy-sorrow-*fearintimidationpanic****guiltguiltguiltnononono***—

“***I-I-I AM-I-I-I HERE!***

Hawks blinked and realized a few things.

One, he had drifted again.

Two, his back was to the wall.

And three, Miruko was in front of him, cautious movements suggesting she was trying to calm down a frightened and injured animal.

Behind her, All Might looked as if he were trying to make himself appear as small and not-intimidating as possible, which was kind of hilarious considering his massive size. A hysterical laugh tore itself out of Hawks’s throat and he clamped his mouth shut because he had to be *quiet*. The voices were clamoring so much he had no clue who was who. He plugged his ears and he shook his head back and forth.

Suppress. Suppress. Suppress suppress suppress suppress—

Something touched his arm and he tried and failed to back up because the wall was still behind him. All Might wisely retreated, still trying to appear small and nonthreatening. His smile was gone. His lips were moving. Words slowly made their way through the violent static in Hawks’s head.

"—hear me, Hawks? I apologize if my arrival caused you distress."

Hawks stared at him mutely, unable to find his voice. His chest heaved like a frightened rabbit’s and his knew his pupils were blown wide. He managed a grunt and clutched at his left arm— *still there*.

All Might was h—

All Might was *present* and Hawks was in his boxers and a ratty t-shirt.

After having some kind of definitely-*not*-a-panic-attack because he did *not* have those.

Well then.

That was unfortunate.

“...Do you want me to leave?” All Might asked.

Hawks made a strangled sound that would probably be more natural coming from his animal counterpart. He hastily shook his head as All Might murmured an apology and inched

towards the door.

“No. I’m fine.” His voice was too breathy but he could not draw in enough air to make it sound more natural. “Just… not used to people. Startled me.”

The excuse was so lame Hawks was surprised neither All Might nor Rumi called him out on his bullshit. Especially Rumi. He rubbed his left bicep and flexed his fingers. The voices went silent and he knew Purple had used his Quirk again. He had not even heard him this time…

Suppress.

Hawks smiled. “Hi, All Might. What’s up?”

All Might’s smile was back but it had an undercurrent of such *what-the-actual-hell-is-going-on* that Hawks almost had another hysterical giggle-fit. He held it in.

All Might seemed to shake himself out of his stupor. “I am here!” Hawks repressed a flinch. “…to see how you are doing.”

“…Oh.” Hawks said dumbly. “I’m fan-freaking-tastic, as you can see.” Miruko jabbed him in the side and he winced. “Sorry, that was rude.”

All Might looked more worried than offended. "If anything, it is I who is the ‘rude’ one here, arriving so unexpectedly. I did not intend to visit so late but I have been rather busy."

"It's fine." Hawks said faintly.

Without the voices’ unease haunting him, it was a bit easier to talk to the Symbol of Peace, but not by much. Guilt did not cloud his mind, but a strong feeling of inadequacy did because this was *All Might* and Hawks was far from his best self at the moment.

He was a big fan of Endeavor but All Might was the one he most looked up to as *the* Hero. The Symbol of Peace's heroic nature was so blatantly good it seemed impossible. When he was younger, Hawks had feared All Might had a hidden dark side like many other Heroes but after meeting the man and seeing him in action, he realized All Might was the real deal. He was so genuinely heroic Hawks could not help but admire him. The Commission forced him to be a Hero, but All Might made him *want* to be a Hero.

He wanted All Might to see him at his best, not the mess he’d become.

Hawks was not one to usually feel shame, but he sure as hell did right now.

He hoped he hid it well.

Hawks and Miruko settled on the couch while All Might sat in her chair. He was so big it looked like nothing more than a child’s seat. Miruko belatedly asked if he wanted anything to drink but he politely declined. Hawks focused on All Might’s nose to give the impression he was meeting his gaze.

“So you came all this way to check up on me? Thanks, I guess. You didn’t have to."

“I did not have to but I wanted to see you for myself.” All Might said earnestly, and if it were most other Heroes Hawks would be suspicious of how true that was. But this was All Might so he knew it was genuine. “You gave us quite the scare, young Hawks. We believed the worst.”

“Yeah, I heard the Heroes were ready to declare me dead.” Hawks ignored All Might’s wince because he was simply stating facts. There were other things to be upset about. "As if I’d die like that. Could you imagine the cliche speeches the other Heroes would give at my funeral? It'd be a *travesty*. I’d have to come back from the dead just to call them out on their fakery." He slouched in his seat and ignored Miruko’s nudge to sit up straight. “So what has you so busy? Have crime rates gone up?"

All Might shook his head. "No, that's not it. I've simply taken a job at UA."

"I think I heard that somewhere." Hawks mumbled. "You wouldn't happen to be teaching Class 1-A would you? I've got a few interns coming from there." The voices shifted into near-consciousness and pain stabbed through his head. He rubbed his temple furiously. *Quit it. I told you, I’m not going to sit around when I can gather intel.*

“Ah, yes. Young Todoroki, Iida, and Tokoyami are all wonderful students.” All Might said with that unbelievably *genuine* enthusiasm. “They will be great Heroes someday.”

“Glad to hear it.” Hawks propped his elbow on his knee and leaned on his hand. “They’re my first interns so do you have any teaching advice?”

All Might awkwardly scratched his cheek. “One of my old teachers says I’m terrible at teaching and explaining things…”

“All Might, bad at something? How can this possibly be?” Hawks teased.

The Symbol of Peace’s laugh was comforting, like a warm blanket or hot chocolate. They had not heard it in so long. They never realized how much they missed—

*Keeping individuality I am **keeping** individuality I am myself and no one else **yesssss** .*

Hawks glanced at the clock and put his head in his hands. *I saw, Rumi.*

She shot him a look— that had *better* not be pity. It had better *not* be.— which told him he had not spoken aloud again.

At least All Might did not appear pitying. Just even more concerned.

Eff my life.

Hawks threw on a smile. “Sorry about that. I promise my… *unawareness* will not affect my performance at work.”

“That’s not our priority, dumbass.” Miruko muttered.

Hawks made the wise and not-at-all-petty decision to ignore her. All Might looked a bit out of his depth, and why wouldn't he be? Hawks was a freaking mess who couldn't have a single conversation without flinching or sinking into his head like a *dumbass*. The lack of control tightened his airway to strangle him and he gritted his teeth.

"I'm *fine*." he spat with more vitriol than he meant. He felt his feathers fluff up and pulled his wings closer to his body. "*Sorry* I can't act normal."

"'Can't act normal?' You're jumpier than a startled chipmunk." Miruko muttered.

Hawks kept his anger off his face and fiddled with the collar of his shirt so he would not grab his feathers instead. If he started pulling them out he was absolutely certain Miruko would drag him back to the hospital and All Might would help her because they both probably thought he was a *stupid wreck* who couldn't take care of himself.

Hawks' ire bubbled over. Screw this. Screw secrets. Why the hell couldn't he just tell them the truth, huh? Maybe they'd believe him and he'd actually be able to do something instead of constantly drowning in his own thoughts—

"*Don't."* Purple whispered. *"They **won't** believe you."*

Hawks hadn't realized he was still in contact. It was obvious in hindsight since of course Purple would not silence himself. He immediately responded, trusting Purple not to take advantage of him. *You don't know that.*

"*I do. Because you're not acting sound of mind right now."*

And whose fault is that? Hawks snapped.

Purple winced.

Sorry. And wasn't *that* Hawks' catchphrase as of late? *I know you had no choice either.*

He blinked and felt the childish desire to take the closest objects and start throwing them. He was honestly surprised All Might was still there. The guy must have the patience of a saint. Of course he did. He was *All Might*.

How could he look over and smile so genuinely— like everything was going to be *okay*— when they were like this?

*I. When **I** am like this.*

Damn. It.

I... "...missed that." he mumbled. "What?"

"I was congratulating young Miruko on her promotion." All Might said and Hawks knew it was the truth. His ever-present smile shrank a little bit, becoming something softer. "I am glad you have returned to us."

Was he talking about Hawks's disappearance or his drifting?

Exhaustion swept over Hawks— he was so *tired of this*— and his shoulders slumped. "Why do you even care?" He asked, voice flat. "I'm…" …*supposed to be better than this.*

All Might frowned and stood up, leaning over Hawks in a way that was was nothing like Endeavor's attempts at intimidation. He placed warm hands onto the younger Hero's shoulders and Hawks had no choice but to look him in the eye.

"You are a good Hero, and a strong young man, young Hawks. But everyone needs help sometimes, and I am here to assist you, if you want."

He meant it. He was the Symbol of Peace who should be too busy saving innocent people to worry about someone who should be able to take care of themselves, but he *meant* it. Of course he did. He was *All Might*. A great Hero. A great man. In comparison, Hawks was inadequate. A nothing. A *failure* because in the end they had lost. He couldn't even live up to All Might's legacy when couldn't they when they had already ruined the world.

Hawks dug his fingernails into the skin on his legs so he would not grip his head or rip out feathers. "I bet you didn't expect this when you came to visit."

All Might did not take advantage of the obvious opening to needle Hawks for information. His expression remained kind. His smile was gentle. A part of Hawks that he was not completely sure *was* himself resisted the urge to scream at him to *stop looking at him like that because he failed* ***we failed you—***

Instead All Might scrawled something on a scrap of paper and handed it to Hawks. "This is my personal number. And…" He hesitated briefly before taking the paper back and scrawling another one. "This is the number of my secretary, a trusted friend. I know he is a stranger to you, but if you cannot get into contact with me, call him if you ever want to speak to someone who will never judge you."

Hawks carefully took the paper back and glanced at the name next to the second number. *Toshinori Yagi.*

He immediately went through his memories to see if he had heard of this man before but came up mostly blank. He might have heard about the secretary of All Might's agency in the past, but he was a complete stranger. Still, it was clear All Might trusted him enough to think he could help Hawks. That was clear as day in everything from All Might's open expression to the calmness in his voice, as if he were stating simple facts. Hawks did not like the idea of trusting a stranger, but this stranger was trusted by All Might, making it unlikely he was secretly working for a different party.

Maybe a stranger was what he needed.

"Thank you." He looked up and did a double-take. "…You're smoking."

"Indeed I am." All Might said with a laugh. "I must go. If you need anything, call and I will be there."

He vanished like the wind.

Hawks squinted at the empty spot All Might once occupied and turned to Miruko. "I didn't just hallucinate that, right?"

She shook her head and side-eyed him. "Do you usually hallucinate?"

"*No*." he snapped.

Her lips were pressed thin. "Hawks… I really think you need to talk with someone."

"*Ha*. You tell the best jokes." he said without inflection.

Even if he saw a therapist, he could not tell them the truth. If he did, they would misdiagnose him at best or let the Commission quietly try to lock him up somewhere— if he was lucky— at worst. If Hawks were being cynical, he suspected the Commission would have already locked him away somewhere if his return to civilization had not been so publicized. To make sure he was not a spy, or brainwashed, or a threat to Hero Society, of course. Not to mention…

'*Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face. You are a hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

He patted his pockets and palmed his face. "I don't have a phone. I've been using the communicator in my headphones to keep in contact with my Agency…"

"We'll get you one in the morning."

Miruko plucked the number from him and added All Might's number to her phone. He noticed she did not add Yagi's. That comforted him somewhat because if he ever talked to this secretary guy, he wouldn't talk to Miruko behind his back. Hawks hoped so, at least.

All Might trusts him, Hawks reminded himself, and the voices stirred with a mix of *agreement-guilt-failure-sorrow.*

Hawks looked at the clock and saw he had drifted another five minutes.

Miruko was still there, even though she should have gone to bed hours ago.

The voices were back in full force, their attempts to be quiet rocketing through his brain like bulls in a glassware shop.

He refused to look up from his shaking hands.

"I can't make any promises."

She knew he was not talking about a stupid phone.

XXXXXXX

Outside of Miruko's apartment complex, Toshinori Yagi breathed heavily as he leaned against an alley wall. That had been a close one. All Might had been pushing his limit before he arrived at Miruko's apartment but he had not wanted to delay his visit any longer. He was glad he didn't because if he had arrived at a different time, he likely would not have seen how much Hawks was hurting.

And by One for All, that young man was *hurting*. All Might had no idea what happened to him in the year he was missing but he doubted Hawks simply wandered around a forest. *Something* had happened to him, something terrible enough to make him press himself against a wall and stare at *All Might* as if a Nomu stood in his place.

The genuine confusion Hawks displayed when All Might showed concern for him was, well… concerning. All Might and Miruko both had been reluctant to talk about Hawks while he was… 'drifting', but she had mentioned his bewilderment whenever she showed she cared in passing. It was clear to All Might that Hawks thought they shouldn't worry about him and felt doing so was a waste of their time.

Had the young man always had such little value in himself? If he had, All Might failed to notice. Although it was not expected of him to since he rarely interacted with the Number Three Hero, Toshinori felt he had failed him somehow by not being there.

Well, he would be there now, as Toshinori *and* as All Might. It may be a little underhanded to offer Toshinori Yagi as an open ear, but he knew Hawks would never speak openly to All Might. He would not speak openly to anyone connected to Hero Society, because he could not afford to show weakness. Toshinori loathed that aspect of the Society he protected, but there was little he could do about it. Pro Heroes had to ensure the public felt safe, even at the cost to themselves.

Still, there was more to be worried about than Hawks's mental health.

Loathe as Toshinori was to admit it, Tsukauchi was right.

Something wasn't right about all of this.

Chapter End Notes

The one shot detailing Mockingjay's backstory is up. Again, it does have some "spoilers" (as in it reveals her Quirk and backstory), but check it out if you want.

@glorious_creativity made more awesome fanart! (Thank youuuuu!!!) See it here.
(Note: Sometimes it says "No posts found". IDK why. Reload the page a couple times and they'll show up. *shrugs*) (Editx2: Link is broken. I can't seem to fix it.)

Giving Reasons

Hawks was not anxious as he sat on the couch in his office and flipped through some case files, getting caught up with what he had missed while he was… gone. Normally he would be out stopping baddies and saving the day but his interns should be arriving soon. So instead he took a minor break to read some boring mission reports. Woo.

At least he would not be sweaty from flying all day. He had to look his best, or at least not like a mental wreck. A lot of the grey was gone from his wings due to using those feathers and a few square meals, and the shadows under his eyes were easily covered by makeup. The marks on his neck, not so much. It was a good thing the handprint-shaped burn was covered by his collar. Weirdly enough, White exuded flares of guilt whenever Hawks moved wrong and felt a string from it, but no amount of prodding gave him any answers as to why.

Indeed, Hawks was not anxious.

But the voices *were*.

Their anxiety buzzed through his body and made his skin prickle. It made him antsy, and he had to resist the desire to get up and start pacing around the room. Or yanking out feathers because although he was not stressed himself, their stress was leaking into him like a parasite. The only reason he was not drifting was because he was not being drowned, as voices kept randomly vanishing from his head. It took him embarrassingly long to realize there was a reason.

What are you doing and should I be concerned?

"*We are compartmentalizing— or trying to— so no."* Red said.

"*Ha. Compart**mental**izing."* Yellow giggled.

"*We've been trying to rely on you and Purple for control but **we're** the ones in your head."* Green elaborated. *"If anyone can stop us from overwhelming each other, it should be, well… **us**. So we're trying to… 'build' a place for us to stay out of your conscious mind."*

"*Pink's been amazing!"* Yellow interjected. *"Her par— Uh, she knows people who own a construction company so she's been helping us visualize rooms and stuff."*

Pink's parents own a construction company. Noted. He ignored Yellow's sheepish laugh. *So you're trying to build mental blocks? Like some people with psychic Quirks have?*

"*Indeed."* Silver made a frustrated noise. *"I wish we had thought of this solution sooner."*

Hawks hummed and did not confront them on how their desire to keep certain things secret from him was another reason why they were working so hard. He heard a human imitation of nails being hit with a hammer. Which were followed by equally-human sawing noises.

*Yellow, are you **making** construction noises?*

"*...Nooooo?"*

Hawks shook his head affectionately. *You're all hopeless. How did I get saddled with you?*

"*Accidentally. Our original plan was to be in our own bodies."* Green answered the rhetorical question, likely unwillingly. *"...It didn't happen."*

*No **really**? I had **no** idea your plan went wrong. What a surprise!*

Green retreated in embarrassment and Hawks felt him double his efforts to create a 'space' for himself and the others. The realization that they *could* do that struck him and he frowned.

So I never asked before, but what is it like in there?

"*Dark."* Pink mentioned. *"And kinda empty?"*

Hawks pouted. *Rude.*

He got an impression of her cheeks turning pink. *"Wait, no! I didn't mean it like that!"*

"*It is mostly a black space."* Red explained. *"We can sometimes see through your eyes and feel what you feel— physically, I mean. We can't see each other at the moment, I'm afraid. We are working on it. Right now we only get these… **impressions** of what our expressions would be if we still had bodies, like you do. But other times we simply… float in nothingness and lose all contact with the outside world except you. That is usually what happens when you sleep or we become caught in our emotions or drift. We can still hear you but we are… weightless."*

"*It's almost like we do not exist when we're like that."* Silver added quietly.

Hawks recalled what it was like to be trapped in his own body, unable to take control. His skin crawled. *Must be scary.*

"*It's gotten better now that we're being proactive and doing something to hopefully prevent it."* Red said evasively.

Hawks dropped the subject. He flipped through more mission reports and lingered on one dealing with Quirk trafficking. A grim, satisfied smile graced his lips as he read all parties had been rescued and all criminals arrested. Mockingjay had been busy when he was gone.

"*Hawks?"* It was telling that Green had to call for his attention. Maybe their mental-room-thing would actually help. *"Is there any way you can get involved in the Shie Hassaikai yakuza investigation?"*

Hawks did not recall seeing that name in any of his files which likely meant his Agency was currently uninvolved. *Without being suspicious about it? Sure, but it'll take some work. And time. I know I'm the Number Three Hero but I can't just waltz in and ask to be involved with something I shouldn't know about.*

Green made a frustrated sound. *"Eri can't wait that long."*

Hawks was tempted to dramatically gasp and declare his shock that they'd let an actual name slip but he kept quiet. He glimpsed the voices' conflicted feelings and sighed.

I get the sense you want to do something illegal. ***Don't*** *think about it,* he added sharply. *If I get involved and then questioned by Tsukauchi about whatever it is, we're screwed. We're already in hot water because we can't prove we've been in the woods all year.*

Green hesitated, and Hawks got the impression he was metaphorically chewing on his lip. *"What if… you* ***weren't*** *involved in that thing we are not planning? Plausible deniability."*

Hawks realized what he was implying and swallowed. *You want to do that thing that White did. You want to take control. That's a big thing to ask, Green.*

"*It's to save a little girl."*

If Hawks did not know better he'd think Green was being manipulative and trying to guilt him into *giving up his body*. Unfortunately he *did* know better and that Green was being genuine. He was like All Might in that way. Hawks ignored the uneasy churning in his gut and took a breath.

We'll deal with this after the internships. We need to test some things before you go running off and ***not*** *do illegal stuff, and I can't afford to walk into work not being myself if something goes wrong. My sidekicks might not notice but Mockingjay will as soon as you open my mouth.*

"*...Fine."* Green muttered.

Hawks could feel his unhappiness over the delay but his determination soon outweighed it. He set the file down and picked up another one. *My interns should be arriving soon. Are you going to be okay or do we need Purple to do an emergency 'mute button'?*

"*I think we'll be fine, Gold."* Pink said, but she did not sound very confident.

Hawks paused mid-flip. *What did you just call me?*

Pink squeaked and her embarrassment tickled his consciousness. *"I— uhhhh."* He felt her scramble for an excuse before her shoulders figuratively slumped in defeat. *"...I called you 'Gold'. Since we all have color names I thought I'd give you one so you wouldn't feel left out of the team."* He got the impression of someone covering their red face. *"Oh, that sounds so childish when I say it! Um, think it? What's the right word for this?"*

"*Share it…?"* Green offered, twitching from the second-hand embarrassment.

Hawks chuckled. *'Sharing' works. Ugh, terminology is awful. And a correction: it's adorable, not childish. I'm touched. Thanks for wanting to include me.*

He knew she felt his genuineness. She responded with her own— still slightly embarrassed— joy.

"*Hawk— Um, Gold? Are we really using such nicknames…? We may as well. It may be useful to get into the habit."* White's interjection went off track before returning to what he intended to say. "*When the interns arrive you should tell them the truth about why you chose them."*

Tell them I chose a couple of them because the voices in my head said to?

His sarcasm went right over White's head. *"No. That is not what I meant. You should… be genuine. Be yourself. Show why you are interested in teaching them. And please do not make jokes. Shoto—"* He said the name cautiously as if it felt odd on his tongue. *"—does not understand them."*

Know that from experience? Hawks prodded suspiciously.

"*No."* Unlike with Silver, who wore his thoughts on his sleeve, Hawks could not tell if White was lying. He must have a killer poker face.

"*How would my facial expression kill someone? That is not part of my Quirk's power-set—"*

"*White is correct."* Green interjected hastily. *"They'll be more likely to trust you if you show you're invested in their growth."*

You want them to trust me enough to be able to approach me. Hawks translated. *And here I thought you couldn't be manipulative.*

"*It's n-not manipulative."* Green stammered. *"I just think— No, I **know** they need someone like you to look up to."*

"*I agree."* Silver said firmly.

The half-joking and sarcastic protest about how '*Oh yes, I sure am someone to look up to with all my problems*.' that Hawks had been thinking died without being shared.

"*Well, technically only Tokoyami will look **up** to you since Todoroki and Iida are already taller than—"*

*Finish that sentence, Yellow. I **dare** you.*

Yellow laughed nervously.

Hawks heard the door open and closed the case file he was looking at, turning towards it. He did not let his surprise show as Mockingjay led the three interns inside rather than one of his sidekicks. For a foolish second he thought she was being nice to the kiddies but then he saw her fingers twitch. Ah. It seemed Mockingjay's infamous paranoia was rearing its head. Hawks could not blame her. He just hoped she did not shoot his interns. That would be an awful first impression.

Hawks felt the voices slam a door shut between them— rickety and fragile but at least it was *something*— and grinned lazily.

"Hey. Welcome to the Kettle."

XXXXXXX

"Hey. Welcome to the Kettle."

Todoroki's first thought about Hawks was that Endeavor must hate him. Todoroki was not the best at reading people but everything from his casual smile to his slouched position to his hooded eyes spoke of pleasant irreverence. The casualness of his office— which looked more like a living room with a desk rather than the office of the Number Three Hero— only added to that thought. If Todoroki were the type to bet, he would bet that All Might could crash land in front of Hawks and he would only blink lazily and say 'Hey'.

Indeed, that was Todoroki's first thought upon meeting the Number Three Hero.

The first thing he *said* was "I thought this organization was called 'Hawks Hero Agency'?"

Tokoyami sent Todoroki a scandalized look— or as scandalized as someone with a bird head could be. Iida looked like he wanted to say something of the lecturing nature but held it in.

Hawks chuckled. "It is. We just call it 'the Kettle' because that's what a group of wild hawks is called."

That made some bit of sense to Todoroki. "Ah. I see."

Iida was still biting his lip. It did not take long for his thoughts to overwhelm his filters.

"I apologize if Todoroki's question was rude." He blurted with a deep bow.

Todoroki went over what he said and failed to see what could have been rude to say. Had he missed something again? Before he could consider bowing as well, Hawks waved vaguely.

"Hey, it's a valid question. No need to apologize. Ask whatever you like." His tone was kind and nonjudgmental but Iida still flushed.

Hawks stood and walked up to them with surprising speed.

As in 'moved so fast Todoroki blinked *and he was right in front of him* ***holy shi***—' speed.

Iida squeaked in surprise and Tokoyami might have as well, though he would never admit it. Todoroki merely stared.

Hawks looked much healthier compared to how he had been in that video. If not for the circles under his eyes and the lingering splotches of grey feathers in his wings, Todoroki might have forgotten he had been considered missing just a few days ago. He also noticed he was taller than the Pro Hero. Was having a shorter stature a bird-Quirk thing? Tokoyami was rather short as well. Todoroki opened his mouth to ask and reconsidered it. He could always question Midoriya about it later.

"So tell me about yourselves!" Hawks said enthusiastically. He pointed at Iida. "You first."

Iida bowed. "I am Tenya Iida, temporary-Hero name 'Iida'. My Quirk is—"

"No, no. You misunderstand." Hawks interrupted, hands flapping in the air. Did he always move so much? "Tell me about *yourselves*, not your Quirks. I know about those." When three befuddled students stared at him he gestured animatedly, wings twitching. "What's your goal here? Why do you want to be Heroes? What's your priorities when it comes to Hero work? What's your favorite food?"

Iida blinked at him, mouth open as if he had been unprepared for such questions.

Hawks blinked back. Not with his human eyelids, but with a strange film that went over his eyes. Todoroki would not have noticed it if he had not been watching him so carefully. It gave the illusion Hawks did not blink at all, which was a bit unsettling.

"Let me go first." Hawks offered. "My goal's to teach you three and prepare you for real-life Heroism. I want to be a Hero to create a world where we can afford a little time off. My priority is civilian rescues and assistance. My favorite food is chicken." He gestured at Iida. "Your turn." A feathery eyebrow quirked upward and although his expression remained open, Todoroki felt scrutinized. "And be honest. I'll be able to tell if you're being disingenuous or fluffing up your goals."

"I came here to increase my speed in new ways that my family might not come up with." Iida began haltingly. "I want to be a Hero to carry on my family's work. My priorities are arresting villains and keeping people safe. My favorite food is beef stew."

Hawks grinned and nodded at Tokoyami. "Go ahead, Black."

"My epithet is 'Jet Black Hero' but my Hero name is 'Tsukuyomi'." Tokoyami corrected gravely.

"I know." Hawks said brightly. Why did he sound so pleased?

Tokoyami sighed. "I came here because I was curious. My priority is gaining control of my Quirk. My favorite food is apples."

"Curious why?" Hawks pressed.

Tokoyami shifted from foot to foot. Todoroki did not think he had ever seen him so out of his comfort zone before. "...Why you chose me." he mumbled.

"Hmm." Hawks said vaguely and did not answer the question. He jabbed a finger at Todoroki. "Your turn."

Todoroki suddenly understood why Tokoyami was so out of his depth. Being the sole receptor of Hawks's knowing gaze made him feel as if every aspect of himself was being analyzed.

"I came here to learn how to be more approachable and talk to people." he began honestly. "I..." He thought about the second question again— *"Why do you want to be a Hero?"*— and drew up a blank. He hadn't… exactly chosen to be a Hero. At least, he had not considered he could have other options since he spent his life training to become a Pro Hero. His motivation

had been to surpass Endeavor without using his left side, but that was not the case anymore thanks to Midoriya. So… why *did* he want to be a Hero? "I…" His discomfort grew.

A warm— *not burning*— hand landed on his left shoulder. He blinked at Hawks, eyes wide.

"You don't have to know your reasons right now." Hawks said gently. "You have time."

Todoroki forced himself to nod and tried not to feel like he had failed at something. "My favorite food is cold soba." He hesitated, a question on his tongue that he was uncertain he should voice. Hawks said it was okay to ask questions though… "What does our favorite food have to do with our internship?"

"Nothing, really. I just want to have stuff in the Kettle's fridge that you'll like." Hawks said casually. He glanced at Mockingjay— Todoroki almost jumped when he saw her because he had forgotten she was there— and leaned close, voice lowering to a whisper. "I'll write your names all over it in ten different languages. Mockingjay likes to steal the food that isn't clearly labeled as belonging to someone, so you should use locks with at least a ten-digit combination— *ow*."

Mockingjay removed her elbow from his side and retreated back to the wall, scowling.

Hawks laughed.

Todoroki forced his fists to unclench.

"Now that that's out of the way, time for the serious stuff…" Golden eyes sharpened and Todoroki instinctively stood at attention. "Listen up. Part of the reason I'm so effective is I'm fast. I go from crime to crime taking care of things and leave my sidekicks for cleanup. Do you know why?"

The three shook their heads.

Hawks smiled with *just* too many teeth. His canines were noticeably sharper than Todoroki's own. Nowhere close to Kirashima's completely shark-like set, but his eyeteeth were just fang-like enough to show. "Because every second I hang around, something else isn't being taken care of. I can't afford to slow down. That being said… I know you three are worth my time."

The way Hawks said it— as if he had complete confidence in their capabilities— warmed Todoroki's heart. His next sentence was like a bucket of cold water.

"But right now I see wasted potential in all of you. You can do so much more."

Todoroki bristled but he forced down his twinging pride. He knew he was not using his fire side to its fullest extent. Nor was he a perfect Hero. That was why he came here: To see his weaknesses and improve. Golden eyes briefly locked with his and he wondered if Hawks had somehow seen his thoughts.

"That is why, from nine to two you'll stick with my sidekicks and help them with clean up." Hawks continued as if he hadn't stopped speaking.

Tokoyami ducked his head and Iida bit his tongue. Todoroki felt a bubble of frustration. He did not come here to be relegated to clean up duty with sideki—

Except… being a Hero was about more than defeating villains. It was about helping people and making them feel safe. Hadn't All Might and Midoriya taught him that? Todoroki forced himself to swallow his pride and nodded.

"I will perform that duty to the best of my ability."

"As will I." Iida said instantly. His back straightened and he nodded his head sharply.

"I will as well." Tokoyami said last, though Todoroki thought he heard some reluctance in his voice.

Hawks looked between the three of them and grinned. "Excellent. From two to eight you're training with me."

"And me." Mockingjay added.

Todoroki did not miss the surprised look Hawks sent her, though he covered it quickly. Grey eyes briefly met his and a chill that had nothing to do with his right side went up his spine. He had no doubt this Hero was dangerous. *Was* she a Hero? She did not introduce herself as one. She only told them her Hero name.

So why did she make him so uneasy?

"Great!" Hawks said brightly, clapping his hands together. "Time's a-wasting so let's go meet the rest of the team."

"I'll take them." Mockingjay interrupted. She stepped away from the wall, arms crossed and fingers flexing. "You have to get that report handed in to the police in ten minutes."

"What report…?" Hawks glanced down at the pile of papers on the table and groaned. "You just put that there. Really? I *know* you did that on purpose." He sat down and flapped a hand towards the interns. "Go. I'll be down in a minute."

He turned to stare unblinkingly at Mockingjay as he said that and she looked away. Todoroki wondered what silent conversation he was missing. He followed his classmates and Mockingjay out of the office. She swiped a card and the doors opened.

"You'll get limited access passes downstairs." she said as they entered. "They'll let you into approved sections of the building. If you try to access restricted areas security will be on you faster than you can say 'oops'."

Todoroki wondered if she meant to sound so threatening. His unease— he *refused* to call it 'discomfort'— around the cold, stoic Hero tripled. Before he could think more on it, Iida slid closer to him.

"Well done on seeing Hawks' test." he whispered. "I had no idea that it existed until after he revealed his true intentions to us."

What test? What intentions? Todoroki thought but kept it to himself.

As he predicted, Iida went on to explain his thought process. "In hindsight, it was obvious Hawks told us we would be working with the sidekicks first in order to see our reactions. Being Heroes is about more than seeking the spotlight, and if we showed scorn for doing the 'less glamorous' part of Hero work, he might have delegated us *only* to that work or sent us home." His blue eyes gleamed with heroic vigor. "You saw what I did not, and admirably accepted work that many would see as 'beneath' their talents. You are truly an inspiration."

"Midoriya's the inspiring one, not me." Todoroki denied.

Iida stared at him, opened his mouth, shut it, and shook his head like he often did when someone like Kaminari missed the obvious answer to a question. Before Todoroki could ask what his classmate thought he got wrong, the elevator doors shut and the lift began to descend. The only indication Todoroki had that it was in motion was the numbers going down. The ride was that smooth.

Mockingjay pressed a button and the elevator stopped.

Todoroki's right side went cold but he held his ice in. They were in a small area, putting himself and Iida at a huge disadvantage, and the blindingly bright lights of the elevator weakened Tokoyami and Dark Shadow as well. Did she know and purposely exploit their weaknesses—?

"Listen up, you three." Mockingjay said sharply. "I know that those reasons you gave might not be the only ones you have for accepting Hawks's offer to come here. So while you are here, you will *not* ask Hawks what happened to him. And if you happen to learn anything about his disappearance, you will not share it with *anyone*. Your teachers, your family, your friends, the news; *no one*. Am I understood?"

Todoroki's first thought was that she had something to do with Hawks' disappearance. Then grey eyes locked onto him and he suddenly knew what it was like to be in a lioness's claws. Logically he knew he could turn her to ice if she moved wrong but logic was hard to come by when faced with someone who would do *everything* in their power to burn their enemies to ashes with no care for what happened to themselves in the process.

"*Am I understood?*" Mockingjay repeated.

Todoroki found himself nodding alongside Iida and Tokoyami.

Mockingjay seemed satisfied by their answer. She pressed a button and the elevator doors opened. Mockingjay stepped out.

"Hawks will be waiting for you downstairs." she said cryptically.

The elevator doors slid shut.

Todoroki, Iida, and Tokoyami stared at the closed doors for a while, then each other. They had no time to process what had just happened before the elevator arrived at their floor.

Hawks was waiting for them when they stepped out. Had he flown down or taken another elevator? He took one look at their faces and sighed.

"I *knew* she did that on purpose." Hawks muttered. He dragged a hand over his face. "What did she say?"

"I think she threatened us." Tokoyami said as if he himself could not believe it despite being there.

"She warned us not to ask or talk about your disappearance." Todoroki clarified out of obligation.

"Of course she did." He gestured for the interns to follow him as he walked. "The news has been hounding everyone and they might hound you if they think you have insider info. It's triggered Mockingjay's overprotectiveness." Hawks grimaced. "I should have seen this coming. The last time someone she loved got hurt she brought down a corrupt Hero Committee and left American Hero Society on the verge of collapse. They only survived by adapting new laws that prevented exploitation…" He rolled his shoulders and the movement rippled down to the tips of his wings. "I'm honestly surprised she didn't tear the country apart looking for me."

Iida gave a nervous chuckle and Todoroki realized Hawks must be exaggerating Mockingjay's actions for a joke. In Todoroki's opinion, the Winged Hero looked too serious for someone trying to be funny, but Shoto was never that good at understanding these types of social interactions.

Hawks gave them a crooked smile. "I apologize on her behalf. I promise she's nicer once you get into her good books, but I'm afraid I can't promise that'll happen in a week."

So we may be dealing with an overly-suspicious instructor for the week, Todoroki thought. *Wonderful.*

"How did you manage to get through to her?" he asked because he *was* here to learn social skills and Mockingjay seemed to have the social skills of Endeavor.

Okay, maybe that was a bit harsh on Mockingjay but Todoroki could not stop himself from being disconcerted by her cold, intense exterior.

At his question, Hawks's smile dropped. His lips went thin with clear displeasure but he still replied. "I got a quick pass because I reminded her of some people."

Todoroki wisely dropped the subject. He followed Hawks and the others as the Pro Hero introduced them to who they would be working with during the day. He knew everyone's names— and who liked to take food from the fridge that was clearly not theirs— and Todoroki marveled at the ease in which he talked to every person. He could never imagine being so sociable.

They were approaching the front desk to greet the receptionist when Todoroki spotted a familiar silver-armored figure. What was Iida's brother doing here?

Beside him, Iida's pace slowed. "Tensei?"

Ingenium started in place and whirled around. "Tenya. I did not realize your internship had started."

"Yep. These three are with me for the week." Hawks said lightly. His eyes half-closed, giving him a lazy, uninterested look. "What's brought you all the way here?"

Ingenium hesitated. His mask made it impossible to see what he was thinking.

"They're working *with* me." Hawks said.

Todoroki wondered why he was rephrasing what he had already said. Before he could think to ask, Ingenium removed his helmet, revealing stress lines and a darkening bruise on the left side of his face.

"The Hero Killer, Stain, has escaped from custody." He began in a dull monotone. "Six of the Heroes escorting him to prison are dead. He was rescued by the League of Villains."

XXXXXXX

Hawks had learned many things in the past few hours.

One, he and the voices should never have expected things to go that easily.

Two, people could be woefully complacent when they thought they were safe.

Three, the media was more corrupt than even he knew.

And four, there were so many swears in the world he never knew before.

Thanks to Orange, Hawks was pretty sure he knew them all by now. The explosive voice had not stopped cursing since Ingenium told them what happened. Hawks was surprised the other voices had not tried to calm him down or pulled him back into their 'room' to stew. His best guess was they had let him out in order to keep him from destroying the tentatively-built 'mental rooms' they had created. It was giving Hawks one hell of a headache but he would rather deal with one super-angry voice than seven or eight panicking ones.

And the others *were* panicking. Hawks could feel their turbulent emotions through the walls. Fractured thoughts of *"He escaped. He's still out there. Has nothing changed?* ***Can nothing be changed?***" jabbed at him and he nibbled on his lip.

Hawks swore he smelled nitroglycerin. He really hoped he was not developing olfactory hallucinations.

News of the Hero Killer's escape had not yet reached the public. Instead a story about a newborn litter of puppies played. Hawks understood the sentiment, but loathed it at the same time. Monsters like Stain should not be given publicity, but that only meant the Heroes in Hosu thought they were safe.

Stain needed to be located and arrested.

Fast.

So Hawks had returned to Hosu with Ingenium and his three interns in tow. It was an understatement to say he disliked having the students with him while hunting such a dangerous villain, but Silver had mentioned that they may go on their own if he did not invite them. At first Hawks had been hard-pressed to believe that they would manage to get to Hosu without someone— as in the overly suspicious Mockingjay— stopping them, but the younger Iida's clenched jaw suggested he was not as level-headed about the situation as he should be. His brother had nearly been killed by Stain. *Again*.

Hawks listened impatiently as Ingenium laid out what he knew about Stain, keeping an eye on his interns to gauge their reactions.

"The Hero Killer confronts four Pro Heroes per city before moving on. He attacked me —" *Twice*, went unsaid. The younger Iida's fist clenched but Ingenium did not appear to notice. Hawks did. "—and killed two so he's either on three or four. He should still be here. Everyone have their comms to the correct frequency?"

The interns nodded.

"Before we go, come here." Hawks ordered. They gathered in front of him and he clasped Ingenium's hand before showing it to the interns. "You *should* be staying with me—" Iida looked away. "—but there's always the chance something will go wrong. That's why I'm sticking a feather to your palms. If you find the Hero Killer, press your thumb against your pinky like this." He gestured. "It'll break the feather and alert me. Use your better judgment when I'm not there. If you need to use your Quirks *to protect someone*, I give you permission."

Hawks had to wonder if he could be any more obvious, but Iida did not seem to be fully listening, even as he accepted a feather.

"*Oh dear. Even without Tensei's permanent injury I'm still angry..."* Silver whispered.

"*Well, the guy who attacked and nearly killed your brother did attack him again and escape custody...*" Yellow mentioned meekly.

"Why do we need permission?" Todoroki challenged, bringing Hawks' attention back to the outside world.

"Because otherwise you'll get in a bunch of legal trouble." Hawks shot back. "There's a reason civilians don't usually use their Quirks to defend themselves, even if they could. It's a messed up system, but it's the law."

"*Are we hypocrites for not objecting to him saying that?"* Yellow asked. *"I mean, we are planning to go on a mission that's unauthor—"*

"*Hush, Yellow."* Purple hissed.

"Stay in groups, everyone." Ingenium said, returning his helmet onto his head. "He likes to pick off individuals."

"*Coward."* Orange snarled. His anger flared at Hawks like a burning lash.

Hawks did his best to ignore him and led his interns through the city. Despite his promise to Mockingjay and the voices' comments, he wondered if he should have left them behind. It was rude to think, but truthfully they were slowing him down. He refused to leave them alone with a serial killer in the city, however. He sent out feathers in his stead as Green rambled in his ears.

"*There might be a Nomu attack. And Stain might attack the Pro Hero Native. It's… It's so hard to say. We've changed so much but so little at the same time..."*

Hawk scouted the alley from the previous timeline with some feathers and found nothing. *Dammit.*

Green released a shaky breath. *"We should have known it couldn't be that easy. Of course Stain would not just stay put when the League was interested in him—"*

"*Quit whining about the past."* Orange snapped. *"Let's find this bastard."*

"*And keep your interns close."* Silver warned. *"It's clear I—er, Iida wants to go on his own."*

A glance at the silver-armored intern— who purposely looked away from Hawks— told him Silver was right.

"Stay close." he reminded them. "And be ready for more than just Stain. He was rescued with the League of Villains so it's possible he might have friends."

Todoroki and Tokoyami nodded but Iida's posture remained stiff.

Hawks resolved to keep the problem children with him if he had to use feathers to physically keep them there.

He might have kept that promise too if a muscular Nomu did not decide to burst out of a building to grab Tokoyami.

Hawks was on the Nomu before its claws could close around Tokoyami's thin shoulders, kicking it away. It went through the window of a building and he cursed himself for misjudging his leg strength. Three feathers shot after it and he yanked the civilians inside the office away as he slammed into the Nomu, stabbing it through the head with two feather-swords. The Nomu had no time to shriek before it went limp and Hawks stared down at his enemy, fingers flexing.

When in doubt, go for the head.

"*Do that with every Nomu you face."* Orange growled.

Hawks saw a brief flash of a *gigantic creature with familiar blue eyes* before he shook himself. He sprang back out into the street where everything was in chaos— and on fire— as more Nomu attacked civilians. Hawks felt a bubble of panic before the voices slammed the mental doors shut between them He snatched a few civilians from Nomus' graps and flew them out of the battle zone as he checked on Tokoyami.

"Are you hurt?"

Tokoyami shook his head. "I'm fine. Just winded. Ingenium..."

Hawks glanced at the Pro Hero as he nimbly dodged a Nomu's punches.

He also noticed the lack of another silver-armored figure.

A quick glance at the chaotic street told that yes, Iida was gone.

Hawks instantly reached out to find Iida's feather and found his *totally not disobedient* intern was no longer holding on to it. His other feathers shot through the city, rescuing civilians and pulling them to safety. A few feathers burned and he realized Endeavor was in the area.

Hawks scanned the area frantically and saw no signs of ice.

It took him half a second to realize Todoroki was gone as well.

...Can mentors ground their interns? Or screech at them? Because I am ***tempted*** .

Hawks looked at Tokoyami and threw his hands into the air. "Why did I bother?" he groaned. He pinned his remaining intern with a sharp glare. "If I leave suddenly, stay with Ingenium."

"Yes, Hawks-sensei."

Hawks shut his eyes and a cold sensation tingled through his senses.

Had… Had Todoroki *frozen* his feather to try to *block* Hawks?

Yep. I'm going to screech at them. If Present Mic can scream at people so can I.

At least he had not attached it to Todoroki's left hand. With all the feathers Endeavor was burning, Hawks would not be able to tell the difference. He tried to find the source of the cold but Todoroki's ice made everything fuzzy, like he had been standing in a snow storm for too long. If it turned out he did that on purpose, Hawks was going to *explode*.

Something *snapped* and a chill went up his spine.

Todoroki had broken his feather.

The world blurred around Hawks and he appeared next to his student, grabbing him by the back of his uniform and yanking him back. A knife nearly grazed Todoroki's shoulder— one that would have gone into his chest if Hawks had not yanked him aside. White's panic was nearly palpable but the others' terror-turned-focus*keepthemalive* overruled it.

Because Stain had Iida by his hair, with a knife to his throat.

It was obvious the student was still paralyzed. Midoriya and Native were as well, laying on the floor of the alleyway. Hawks caught a glimpse of Midoriya's hand— were his arms *broken?*— and saw a slash across his chest. Orange's rage rose above the throng, accompanied by a mantra.

Protect protect protect ***protect the future Symbol*** —

Hawks pushed down the *fury* that boiled his blood and glared at the Hero Killer. "I didn't know you were the type to hold kids hostage, Stain."

Stain's pale lips twisted into a sneer. "These are not children. They are Heroes as fake as the rest of you."

Hawks' bared his teeth in response. "Who are you to say that? You don't even know them. Hell, you don't know any the Heroes you've killed." Stain opened his mouth but Hawks wasn't done. "Silver-tongue had an infant daughter who never got to know her dad. Wavery raised money for a children's hospital. Slipstream spent the time she wasn't on duty helping her blind neighbor with her garden. Ingenium's only 'crime' was that he could not face everything alone. And yet *none* of them were good enough for your twisted version of society."

"*They* are the ones who are not good enough!" Stain shouted. "They're fakes who spit on the idea of heroism. And these *children* are just as guilty as their teachers." He pointed a sword at Todoroki. "This one has already been corrupted by his father! If you think he chose your Agency only to learn, then you are a *fool* who does not deserve to be a Hero, just like his father—"

Three things happened at once.

White retreated like his life depended on it.

Orange's fury exploded because *how dare Stain compare his friend to the bastard who—*

And Hawks shot feathers at Stain.

Red fletchettes sank into Stain's hands and exploded.

Not "burst into little fluffs because of an impact" exploded.

They *exploded*, small fireball and all, so quickly Hawks almost thought he had imagined it.

It was enough to make Stain yelp and release Iida. Hawks instantly pinned the Hero Killer to the wall with more feathers— which did not explode *what the hell had that be*— and simultaneously caught Iida before he could hit the ground. He used a couple more to yank Stain's hands up and locked them in Quirk-suppressing cuffs, before pinning him with even more feathers just for good measure.

The take-down took less than a second and he saw Midoriya stagger to a halt, fist raised as if he had been about to punch. Todoroki was up as well. Hawks bit back the desire to screech at them like his namesake just to let some of his boiling anger out— H*ow could they be so* ***stupid****?*— but found himself… sidetracked.

For the first time since he met him, Orange sounded shaken. *"That was my Quirk. You... used* ***my Quirk.***" Fury overwhelmed his terror, exploding like a bomb in Hawks's mind, and his vision wavered. "***How the hell did you do that?*** *Did you* ***steal my Quirk****, you* ***bastard?****"*

"*Orange, shut up!"* Purple shouted.

"*DON'T YOU TELL ME TO—"*

"***Be quiet****."*

Orange went silent.

Hawks blinked and forced his hand to his communicator. "This is Hawks." His voice sounded toneless, almost *listless*, even to his own ears. "Stain is in custody. My interns and Izuku Midoriya are with me."

He received acknowledgment and lowered his hand, checking Native. He and Iida were starting to move again, and Hawks calmly told them to stay put until medics could check them over. He also calmly asked Todoroki and Midoriya where they were injured. He did some basic first aid and kept an eye on Stain as the other heroes arrived.

Very. *Calmly*.

Because internally, Hawks was not calm at all.

And his cold fury was not just his own.

The voices were *pissed*. But at who? The students? Or themselves? They knew something like this was going to happen, they had tried to prevent it, but of course their past selves had to be pig-headed and go off on their own—

Hawks blinked and realized he was with his interns, Gran Torino— Did he just kick Midoriya in the face?— and some of the heroes that worked for Endeavor's agency. Crap, had he drifted? Then how did he *move*? What else had the voices *done* to him—?

He heard the flap of wings and turned in time to see a Nomu grab Midoriya.

And Hawks *moved*.

He yanked Midoriya out of the Nomu's arms and caught him in midair, simultaneously sending two feathers through the Nomu's eyes. It shrieked but did not fall, blindly lunging for the pair with surprising speed. Hawks twisted so his body would take the blow and the Nomu hit him like a truck. He shifted their positions so he'd strike the ground first and immediately rolled so Midoriya was shielded again even as pain shot through his back.

He saw black and lashed out with a kick. To his surprise, the Nomu's leg broke under the blow and it toppled. A sword-like feather went through its throat and its screech cut off as it collapsed in a spray of blood. Hawks stood over the fallen creature, torn between revulsion and sorrow. Images flashed through his mind, too quickly for him to comprehend. All he could decipher was sorrow and a conflicting desire that *this was a monster but could it feel it was in pain it was a person it—*

Red choked on a grief-stricken sob. *"This could have been us if..."*

Faces overlapped, too blurred for Hawks to see, and in their place was a Nomu as it screamed and screamed and *screamed as it begged her to kill them—*

The winged Nomu snarled up at him, struggling weakly. The movements of its distorted limbs were too feeble to be any threat. Hawks knew it was dying. The thought what it must have gone through, of letting it suffer until it passed, seemed *wrong* somehow. Compassion overwrote revulsion and he gently placed his hand on it's misshapen head. The Nomu went still.

"No one will hurt you anymore. You can rest now." Hawks said softly.

The Nomu did not try to attack him. It did not lash out like a wounded animal. Instead if blinked at him with its remaining good eye before it slowly slipped closed. The Nomu's chest stopped moving. Hawks lowered his head and briefly wondered who the Nomu had been.

He snapped to attention as one of Endeavor's heroes gasped.

Stain was out of his cuffs, in front of Hawks and Midoriya. Hawks ignored the pain in his back and yanked Midoriya behind him, noting the positions of his floating feathers. Stain did not attack them, but the aura he gave off sent shivers up Hawks' spine as he stared down Endeavor— when had he gotten there? The bloodlust and fury coming off him in waves was not even directed at Hawks, yet he could not help but shudder in revulsion as a crazed eye landed on him.

"I was wrong about you, Hawks." Stain said reverently and Hawks felt his skin crawl. "You are the epitome of a true hero, unbreakable in your resolve as you throw yourself selflessly into danger for the sake of others. Why do you pretend otherwise?"

Hawks did not deign him with a response, making it seem as if he were focused on checking on Midoriya as he carefully moved his feathers through the surrounding smoke. He bottled his anger deep inside because *that* was all it took? A few acts of heroism and suddenly he was worthy of the *mighty* Stain's approval when so many other good Heroes— good *people* — had been killed? It disgusted Hawks like slime on his tongue, but he kept that anger off his face because Midoriya needed him calm, not enraged.

Stain's approving— *fanatic*— grin morphed into something feral as he glared at the other heroes. "But you… *you* are all fakes!" He bared his teeth, eyes wide and bloodshot as bloodlust rippled off him in waves. "Try and fight me, fake heroes! Try and arrest me in the name of this false system you call justice! The only one I'll let kill me is the true Hero—"

Hawks knocked him out with a feather to the temple. He watched Stain topple as the other Heroes gaped in shock and sat on the concrete, breathing through his nose.

"You okay, kid?" he asked Midoriya as the Heroes finally jolted out of their paralysis and swarmed Stain.

Midoriya stared at him mutely and nodded his head. Hawks began to check him for shock, remaining calm as he asked questions and mentioned his costume, and asked for the story of where its design came from and yes, keep talking kiddo, let me know you're fine...

Stain was dragged off by no less than twenty police and Heroes. Hawks watched them go and felt Green stir.

"*This is bad."* he said faintly.

Explain. Hawks snapped, not in the mood.

"*Last time Stain saved m— Midoriya and it was caught on video. That made a couple League of Villains members not kill him when they had the chance. Without that protection he might get into trouble."*

We won't let him get into that situation.

"*We might not be able to prevent it."* Purple said darkly. *"Tonight shows that our changes might not have lasting effects..."*

"*I don't believe that."* Green said firmly.

"Hawks?" It took him a second to realize Midoriya had spoken. The intern still sat on the ground, pale-faced and fingers mangled from the fight. The confusion in his green eyes was clear as day as they darted from the Nomu to Hawks. "Why did you show compassion to that Nomu?"

Hawks' wings pressed against his back. "Because it was human once."

Together Yet Alone

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once Hawks was let out of his hospital room with only some nasty bruises, he found out he got full credit for recapturing Stain. His interns were mentioned in the article of course, but only that they helped keep the Pro Hero Native alive. They got only a sentence, and nothing more. Hawks expected as much. As he walked, he read the article again with a scowl before stuffing it into his pocket.

His glower was not just because of the 'half-truth' filled article. After all, he was rather torn between a slight annoyance that he'd been unable to tell the world that the interns had faced the Hero Killer to save someone and a boiling *fury* at how they got into that situation in the first place. It did not help that Hawks' anger was not only his own.

The voices were similarly furious, especially Silver, White, and even Green, Pink. and Yellow. Though the last two's rage was a bit more… haunted? Among the ranting Hawks heard similar sentiments from all of the voices, wondering how they could let this happen again because *they should have known better*. Hawks supposed hindsight gave a hell of a lot of context, and got the feeling the fight had gone even *worse* than last time around, which did nothing for the voices' happiness.

So excuse Hawks for being a *little* upset when he was finally allowed to see the injured interns. Tokoyami had been uninjured and thus was sent home, but Todoroki and Iida had both sustained relatively minor wounds from their fight with Stain. They would be in the hospital for a day at most. Midoriya's injuries were more severe— broken bones and a slash across his chest— so he would likely be in bed for the rest of the internship.

Hawks kept his expression coolly neutral as he walked into the room. The students seemed to sense his mood and froze like deer faced with a pack of wolves.

"I'm glad to see you're all awake." Hawks said pleasantly. His smile dropped. "Now would you like to tell me how Deku got to you before me?"

Midoriya shifted in his seat. "Iida ran into Stain first. I found him by accident and contacted Shoto."

"How did you know Shoto was in the area?" Hawks asked sharply.

"I didn't." Midoriya admitted. "I sent my location out in a group chat text. But since Iida was here I guessed that Shoto and Tokoyami were too…"

"You had no other way to contact someone?" Hawks pressed. "No numbers for other Heroes?"

Midoriya shook his head. “My mentor and I weren’t supposed to be here. We were separated by a Nomu attack.” He bowed his head. “It was only after I found Stain that I realized I should have brought a Pro Hero with me. I had a few opportunities during the fight to send a message out but I didn’t remember the numbers and—”

He began to mutter to himself about all the different choices he could have made, along with better ways to counter Stain’s Bloodcurdle Quirk. If Hawks were not so *calm*, he might have smiled in bemusement. Midoriya slowly remembered who he was talking to and stammered to a halt, shifting nervously in his hospital bed.

“You’re exempt from what I’m about to say, Deku.” Hawks said calmly. Pleasantly. *Serenely*. “But now, *dearest* interns, let’s talk about what *actually* happened, yeah?” The students avoided his piercing gaze. “A Nomu attacked Tokoyami. I went into a building after it and saved the people inside. Meanwhile, while Tokoyami was winded and I was distracted, Iida took the opportunity to sneak off to look for Stain. Todoroki noticed and followed him. And when I found you, *you were fighting the Hero Killer*.” He crossed his arms and pinned Iida and Todoroki with an unblinking golden stare. “Why didn’t you contact me?”

“We did contact you.” Todoroki mumbled.

“After Iida had been *taken hostage*.” Hawks said flatly.

Todoroki bristled. “We thought we could handle Stain—”

“And *that’s* the problem.” Hawks interrupted icily. “You *thought* you could. You *intentionally* separated yourselves from me; Iida to hunt Stain down, and Shoto to find you. You went up against a *serial killer on your own*. Iida, you ditched your feather so I couldn’t find you. Shoto, you *froze* yours and did not immediately call for backup even though you had the means *literally* in the palm of your hand. And unless Stain has a technology-blocking Quirk I *miraculously* don’t know about, your communicators were perfectly functional. You had so many ways to get help but you used *none* of them, instead facing the Hero Killer by yourselves *when you didn’t have to!*”

Hawks’s voice rose to a shout and the interns recoiled. Hawks looked both of them in the eye and spoke words he never thought he would say.

“I am so disappointed in you.”

Although his words were not directed at Midoriya, even he seemed to shrink.

Todoroki was the only one still angry, though Hawks could tell he was wavering. “We saved someone’s life.”

“Yes. You saved Native’s life.” Hawks agreed. “But you also gave Stain more hostages. You all *would have died* if—”

“We didn’t.” Todoroki interrupted.

“So that makes this okay?” Hawks asked coolly. “That makes it *okay* that you left my side with the intent of hunting a *serial killer* by yourselves?” The desire to let all his anger out and screech at them like his namesake bubbled up but he swallowed it, because frightening his disobedient interns was not the point. “Once Stain had Iida and paralyzed the rest of you, he had no reason to keep *any* of you alive. Shoto, if you had not broken my feather right then... *You. Would. Be. Dead*.” His anger drained away and shoulders slumped as his wings pressed against his back. “How badly did adults fail you that your first instinct is to rely on your fellow students instead of the professionals for help?”

The students balked.

“They didn’t fail us.” Iida protested.

Hawks pinned him with another stare, but this one was much more tired. “Then why didn’t you contact me? I am here to *teach* you and *help* you grow. I’m not there to hold your hand, but I damn well *better* be there to pull you up when you get in over your head. *That’s my job* as your mentor. You are *students*. *Your* job is to *learn* until you can act on your own. You don’t have to save the world alone yet.” He dragged a hand over his face and sighed. “What on earth were you *thinking*?”

“I wasn’t thinking. I was *vengeful*.” Iida admitted. “The villain who tried to kill my brother escaped and I… I wanted to bring him in myself. I acted out of anger. And pride.” He bowed as much as he could from the hospital bed. “I’m sorry. I accept any punishment you give me.”

Todoroki slowly bowed as well. “As do I.”

“I’m not going to punish you.” Hawks said flatly and they looked at him in surprise. “You will continue your internships with me as planned once you’re out of the hospital. But now we’re adding some lessons about how to deal with situations like this. The first lesson is to *not sabotage your back-up’s best chance of finding you*.”

Todoroki’s shoulders hunched slightly and he mumbled something under his breath.

“What was that?” Hawks asked testily.

Todoroki avoided his gaze. “I did not intend to freeze the feather. It was an accident.”

Hawks’s ruffled feathers went flat. “I believe you.” He pretended not to notice Todoroki’s shocked look, as if he did not expect his word to be taken at face value. “I’ll leave you to rest. Once you get out of here, your internship is back on. Meanwhile you’ll be missing the lessons Tokoyami will have.”

The last of their righteous anger drained away, leaving only guilt.

“We really *are* sorry, Hawks-sensei.” Iida said quietly.

Hawks paused in the doorway. “I know you’re sorry you left me. But I also know you don’t regret what you’ve done. You won today, but you *easily* could have lost. So please... *learn*

from this. You don't have to do things alone."

He stepped out and shut the door before they could respond.

Hawks took a deep breath and hugged himself, shoulders hunched as the walls inside his head *cracked*.

Keep it together just a little longer, please.

"Hawks?"

He instantly straightened and threw on a smile. It faded when he saw Ingenium, out of costume and with stress lines still around his eyes and lingering bruises on his face. Ingenium looked *exhausted*, as if he could barely muster the effort to move. Guilt clawed at Hawks's throat and it was only partly his own.

He cleared it. "Hey. Did you come to visit Tenya?"

"Yes." Ingenium's lips twisted in distaste. "I'm frustrated it took so long but I got caught up in the aftermath of Stain's arrest. Haven't had the opportunity to get away until now."

"I guess I should've picked you up when I made my daring escape from the media then." Hawks teased weakly.

Ingenium *almost* smiled. "Perhaps."

The anger, helplessness, and grief Hawks had been trying to ignore welled up and he bowed low, letting his hair fall into his face. "I apologize for my negligence. I should have kept a closer eye on him."

Ingenium startled and waved his hands in front of him. "No, you don't have to apologize. You had your hands full with those Nomu. Tenya made the choice to leave your side and discarded any ways to find him." He sighed and dragged a hand through his hair. "*I'm* his brother. I should have noticed Tenya was angry."

"You were distracted." Hawks murmured and Orange, White, and Silver shifted in his mind. "We *both* were." He took a shuddering breath. "This will not happen again."

He left Ingenium to visit his brother and avoided the press by taking to the sky. He entered his Agency through the window, locked himself in his office and collapsed on the couch. He grabbed a pillow and covered his face.

Can I scream now?

"*Only if I can join you."* Pink joked faintly.

"***WE ALMOST LOST SHOTO!**"* Yellow screamed.

His words broke the dam and the walls they'd worked so hard to build shattered.

Hawks was yanked under by the horror of eight other people and drowned in a sea of black and grey.

When he regained consciousness, it was night, and a blanket had been thrown over him. He spotted Miruko sleeping in a chair by his desk and tried to sit up, only to collapse back onto it as his head pounded. The voices clamored and he curled up, biting his lip as he struggled to remain silent.

They'd known about Stain. They'd known Iida had a vendetta against the Hero Killer last time. They'd known about the Nomu and Native and Hosu. And yet they *still* were blindsided. They still nearly *failed*. Even worse, this time they almost lost Shoto Todoroki as well. This fight happened before, but they arguably almost came out worse *even though they knew it might happen*.

Needless to say, the time travelers in Hawks' head were not taking it well.

"*Almost lost Shoto almost lost Shoto almost lost Shoto* [illegible]"

Only Green was not trapped in the whirlpool. Instead he muttered a thousand words a minute but Hawks clung to his words like a lifeline, relying on the familiar mumbles to keep his head above water.

"*—so many things could have changed that we'll never know what they are since we weren't present. And it's not like we can got up and ask them 'How does this compare to this theoretical fight.' without seeming suspicious."* Green realized Hawks was focusing on him and spoke louder, drowning out the others as best he could. *"I don't know what happened. Stain was tempted to spare Todoroki and Midoriya last time because they proved themselves to be true heroes in his eyes. But this time..."*

"*—*[illegible]"

"***Focus!**"* Purple shouted and the terrified mantra of madness went silent.

Hawks took a breath, then a few more, allowing his heart beat to slow down. Once he was sure he would not black out, he spoke. *Stain nearly killed Todoroki. Last time he didn't. This time, he did. Why?*

"*I...don't know."* White sounded disturbed.

"*Okay, let's think about this logically."* Purple said. *"What's different from our past?"*

"*Hawks vanished for a year."* Yellow mentioned.

Thanks. I totally needed to be reminded that happened.

"*...Sorry."*

"*Ingenium is okay and Iida and Todoroki interned with Hawks instead of Manual and Endeavor respectively. Since Hawks saved Ingenium from Stain, both were involved in Hosu*

this time—" Green began.

"*Wait, go back."* Red interjected. *"Stain himself mentioned the internship, remember? **Could** it be because Todoroki interned with Gold? He might think Todoroki's reasons for doing so are corrupt."*

Why would his motives be corrupt—? Hawks froze as he recalled Mockingjay's actions from earlier that day. *Information.*

"*Stain likes to create warped misconceptions about people to make them seem guilty and himself justified."* Green said dully. *"From an outsider's perspective, someone might think Todoroki was sent to your Agency by Endeavor to get information about your disappearance."*

But he wasn't, Hawks thought, flabbergasted. *Endeavor was **angry** his son chose my Agency.*

"*Outsiders won't know that."*

Hawks leaned his head against the wall. *I didn't see this coming.*

"*None of us did."* Green sighed.

"*Whoever said changes in the past would be predictable is a lying liar."* Pink muttered.

"*Yeah."* Orange laughed bitterly. *"Especially since we can't let **anyone** know what was supposed to happen."*

Hawks sighed. *We could if you just let me tell—*

"*Orange is right."* Green interrupted. *"We **can't** tell them we're from the future now. It was improbable before, but now with… recent developments—"* Hawks smelled nitroglycerin. "*—it's impossible."*

A cold stone settled in Hawks' stomach. *What are you implying? Spit it out.*

Green sounded absolutely miserable as he spoke. *"Gold, if we tell them the truth, they're going to think we were captured, given multiple Quirks, and turned into a sleeper agent by the leader of the League of Villains: All For One."*

XXXXXXX

...So let me get this straight. This super-evil Villain called All For One controlled Japan from the shadows for a while.

"*Yes."*

He has the ability to give other people Quirks or take them away and transfer them to others.

"*That's right."*

He gave his brother a Quirk that let him stockpile Quirks.

"*Mmhmm."*

And that Quirk— called One For All—was passed down to All Might.

"*Yeah."*

Meanwhile, the villain who gave his brother One For All—All For One— is All Might's archenemy and behind the creation of the Nomus.

"*Yes."*

And because of this… we can't tell anyone I have people from the future in my head?

"*Yes."* Green sighed. *"If you hadn't gone missing, we might have been able to tell All Might the truth, but since you went missing* ***and*** *you seem to have access to at least Orange's Quirk along with your own* ***and*** *you might possibly let slip you know things you shouldn't know since you were 'isolated' the whole year* ***and*** *All For One has become active in the last year..."*

Hawks did not need it spelled out for him. Even with the limited information he had, it seemed obvious what the others would think. He listened as the voices began building their walls again and slumped on the couch, wondering how their luck could be so bad.

After all, the only people with multiple Quirks were Nomu or those that worked for the shadowy leader of the League of Villains, All For One.

There's no other explanation we can give? Hawks thought desperately.

"*That they'll believe? No. Not now."* Green said quietly. *"All For One is active again and All Might knows he's alive. If we approach him like this, after having been* ***conveniently*** *missing for a year, he'll think the worst and lock us up, for others' 'safety'."*

"*And especially our own."* White murmured.

But Nomu are all creepy-looking, Hawks protested. *They've obviously been altered and brainwashed.*

"*Nomu are also mostly unknown at this time. Their origins are almost a complete mystery."* Orange growled. *"Some Heroes know they were humans altered to be able to survive getting multiple Quirks, but they don't know the limitations or how that happens. As far as they know, the villains* ***could*** *create a brainwashed 'normal-looking' sleeper with multiple Quirks."* Foreign grief stabbed Hawks's heart.

"*The villains do this kind of thing in the future*." Silver said softly. *"A sleeper assassinated one of our own."*

Orange's presence shuddered like a leaf floating on a stormy ocean.

Hawks felt ill. *So going missing for a year plus returning with multiple Quirks and information I shouldn't have…*

"*...Equals All For One and possible brainwashing. Yeah."* Green sounded absolutely miserable. *"If we approach them with any information we shouldn't know about they'll think we're a traitor, spy, or sleeper. All the useful information we could tell you to pass on could come from All For One or the League.* ***Telling*** *you about All For One and One For All only makes you more of a suspect. We screwed ourselves over. They'll* ***never*** *believe us about the future."*

Even All Might?

"***Especially*** *All Might. All For One took so much from him. If there's anything that can blind All Might to the truth, it's stuff that involves All For One. All Might won't hurt us—"*

"*Probably."* Orange snarled, but Hawks could feel his sorrow.

"*—but he would let his emotions get the best of him. All For One is the one villain All Might wanted vengeance against. He's one he intended to kill."*

That was a sobering revelation. Hawks imagined a scenario where a seemingly-fine Hero 'randomly' went berserk in a public area and attacked with multiple, unknown Quirks, blindsiding any other Heroes that were nearby. From what the voices told him, that was something All For One would do if he could. Or was it more accurate to say *once* he could?

His stomach twisted into knots as he realized if he were in other Heroes' position and faced with tales of voices and new Quirks from a previously-missing Hero, he'd probably jump on that line of thought and quietly arrest the 'potential sleeper' too. The Hero Commission *definitely* would if they even suspected he had been brainwashed. For '*the public's safety*' and all that.

Hawks tried not to let those thoughts bring him down. *What about Tsukauchi? We could let him use his Lie Detector Quirk on us and—*

"*His Quirk isn't infallible."* White interjected. *"It can be tricked if the questioned believes a lie is the truth."*

"*Or if the questioned is brainwashed."* Purple said bitterly.

Someone else's sorrow slammed into Hawks like a freight train and he curled up, clapping a hand over his mouth.

"*I'm so sorry, Gold."* Pink sobbed. Before he could ask what she was apologizing about, she continued. *"If we mess up,* ***you're*** *the one who will pay for our mistakes. They'll arrest you, interrogate you,* ***torture*** *you even though you're on their side. You're the one who has the most to lose if they turn on us."*

The gravity of the situation hit Hawks then and he put his head in his hands. *If All Might or Tsukauchi don't, the Commission certainly will. Maybe it'll be better if they think I just have*

voices in my head.

"*You **do** have voices in your head."* Yellow joked weakly.

Hawks glanced at Miruko, who still slept soundly in the chair, and wondered what she would think if he told her the truth. She definitely would not label him a spy, but she probably would not believe him— probably labeling him as delusional or traumatized at best— and would try to get him to see a therapist. Rumi was a good friend, but even she would be skeptical.

He looked down at his phone and watched the video of Stain play on a loop and the voices' thoughts ricocheted through his mind. It was inevitable. Despite their efforts, the League of Villains— the League that would become part of the Paranormal Liberation Front that destroyed the world— would form. They acted too late, all because they spent too long trying to put themselves together. Maybe if they hadn't appeared in Hawks' head, if they hadn't made him vanish for a year, if they hadn't told him bits and pieces about the future, if their Quirks didn't come with them, if if *if*…

His shoulders slumped.

We really screwed ourselves over, huh? The worst part is, none of us had any control over it.

Bitter and crestfallen grumbles were all he got in reply.

"*So what do we do now?"* Red asked.

"*What we were planning from the start."* Green stated. *"We change the future."* He hesitated and Hawks could feel his reluctance. *"Gold."* Hawks sensed why he used that 'codename', not merely out of attachment but in an attempt to get into the habit and distance the Winged Hero Hawks from their plans as much as possible. "*We're not waiting until internships are done. We won't tell you when."*

Hawks's insides turned to ice but he nodded. *Okay.*

Before he could muse further about secrets and *others taking control of and using his body* in the near future, a happier thought nagged at him and his unease drained away, replaced by viciously victorious glee. A slow, maniacal grin etched itself across his face.

Oh, and speaking of you voices and your oh-so trustworthy and secretive selves…

Green sighed. *"Gold—"*

*Oh **wow***, Hawks interrupted with as much sarcasm as he could muster. *What a **coincidence**. Izuku Midoriya mutters. That **sure** is familiar. And he's colored green. I wonder—*

Orange stifled a snort.

If Green had eyes, Hawks was sure one was twitching. *"Gold, I—"*

*—who could Midoriya **possibly** be?* Hawks continued loudly. *I mean, it's **soooooo** difficult to tell!*

Red began to giggle.

Green winced. *"Gold, we get it—"*

*There's no **possible** way he could be **Green**,* Hawks interrupted. *I mean, they're soooo different! They both mutter and stuff but that is a plain old coincidence. A **coincidence**, I say! Saying it is not a coincidence is lies. Slander! Fabrications!* Hawks metaphorically tapped his chin in thought. *Oh, I know! Midoriya must be Orange!*

Orange started cackling. *"Ha! I beat you, nerd!"* he crowed.

What could you possibly mean by that, Orange? Hawks asked with fake confusion. *I have certainly not discovered Green's identity.*

Orange cackled louder. If he had a body, Hawks might be worried how he could breathe.

"We get it, Gold." Green groaned. *"We are terrible at hiding our identities."*

*No, **really**?* Hawks asked with innocent sarcasm. *I had no idea you were so bad at that Mister Izuku "Green" Midoriya, who is also **totally** not All Might's successor as the holder of One For All.*

Orange began to wheeze. Yellow, Red, and surprisingly Silver joined him.

Hawks got the distinct impression of Green hiding his face and groaning into his hands.

XXXXXXX

Day One

Tokoyami's second day at Hawks' agency was much less chaotic than the first. The most difficult part was avoiding the press outside of the office and even that went rather smoothly. Hawks had the foresight to realize they would swarm his one not-hospitalized intern and sent out a group of his sidekicks to join Tokoyami a few streets over.

Tokoyami observed with awed befuddlement as the swarm of Heroes casually pushed through the mob of reporters, with him completely unnoticed in the middle. They did it with such practiced ease that he wondered if this was part of Hero training he had not gotten to yet. Though it may have helped that most of them were much taller than he was.

Once they were inside, the sidekicks bade their goodbyes and scurried off to different parts of the building, leaving Tokoyami alone. He dithered uncertainly in the lobby, unsure of where to go, whether he could grab a cup of coffee before getting to work, and acutely aware that Todoroki and Iida were not with him. He hoped they did not get into trouble for their actions at Hosu.

“Hey, Tokoyami!” a voice that was far too chipper for this time of the day called. Hawks bounced over to him— how could he have so much energy?— and held out a cup. “Coffee?”

Tokoyami instantly snatched the cup and downed it. It was black, with no cream and sugar, as coffee should be. Hawks muffled his laughter with his gloves and Tokoyami’s feathers fluffed in embarrassment.

“Er. Hello, Hawks-sensei.” he belatedly greeted with a bow. “Thank you for the coffee.”

“I had a feeling you’d want it.” Hawks chuckled. “I should lecture you about it stunting your growth and whatever but I have a feeling you’d hiss at me.”

“I would not.” Tokoyami claimed, though he definitely would if the Incident Which Shall Not Be Mentioned were any case. It involved a broken coffee maker and an angry Dark Shadow, which, as said previously Would Not Be Mentioned. He gratefully accepted another cup of coffee. “How did you get into this building? The underworld is empty, for all its demons are outside.”

He realized what he said and thanked the Gods of Darkness that his feathers hid his blush as recalled that Hawks could *fly*.

“Demons? Oh, are you talking about the press?” Hawks gave a small chuckle but otherwise did not tease his intern. “I slept in the office. Well, ‘slept’ is a lie. I’m going to be honest and say I got *zero* sleep last night.” He took a sip of his coffee and made a face. “I prefer iced.”

“Iced coffee is a forsaken abomination of sugar and creamer.” Tokoyami growled.

“You have no taste.” Hawks sniffed as if he weren’t the one lacking working taste buds. He waved for Tokoyami to follow him and they walked deeper into the building. “You’ll be working with my sidekicks as planned but for training it’s just going to be me and you today. And Mockingjay, of course.”

Tokoyami shifted from foot to foot. “Did Todoroki and Iida get into trouble?”

“Not *big* trouble. They’re just missing out on some lessons and getting some extra homework. And I lectured them.” His tone was pleasant, but the furious glint in Hawks’s eyes made Tokoyami decide he preferred chipper Hawks. He perked up and clapped his hands together. “Unfortunately your first lesson is how to deal with the press. If any reporters try to interview you, don’t say anything and leave. My sidekicks will run interference.”

“What about Mockingjay?” Tokoyami asked, because if there was anyone who could scare off reporters, she seemed like the best bet.

Hawks shrugged idly. “Mockingjay’s not around this morning. She’s been in this office more in the past few days than she has in the years I’ve known her. She’ll be back for training though. Any more questions?”

Why did you choose me as an intern?

“No, Hawks-sensei.”

Hours later, after a day of running around with Hawks' sidekicks doing cleanup, Tokoyami was more than eager to get into Quirk training. Cleanup work and calming down civilians was exhausting, but as he followed Hawks to an open room in his agency's building, Tokoyami felt his energy return. It helped that Hawks himself was practically vibrating with excitement. If Tokoyami did not know better, he may think his mentor had a Quirk which gave him the properties of a rubble ball. He bounced as much as one. Did he *ever* stop moving?

"Now, what weaknesses do you think your Quirk has?"

"I am personally weak to physical attacks if Dark Shadow is too far from me." Tokoyami mentioned, thinking of All Might's advice. "Dark Shadow is also hard to control in the darkness, and he becomes weak in the light."

Hawks hummed, tapped his chin, and began mumbling to himself in a way that reminded Tokoyami of Midoriya. "We should work on some physical training so you stand a chance if you have to choose between defending yourself or someone else with Dark Shadow. A temporary solution to your second problem could be to carry some type of light source with you like a flashlight, or incorporate a light into your costume. Not as a crutch, but just for emergencies until you can control your Quirk better. As for Dark Shadow becoming weak in light… resistance training *might* be possible, or it could be an unavoidable weakness. You also probably should not try to make it resistant until you improve your control and improve your body's strength. Once we do that we'll start worrying about flying—"

"Flying?" Tokoyami blurted. "Such a power is impossible. I do not belong among the stars, and the sky is forever out of my reach."

Hawks tipped his head and eyed him like he had missed something obvious. "You're a bird, and birds belong in the sky. Why confine yourself to the ground?"

Tokoyami stared at him wordlessly, blindsided by a possibility he never thought of before.

"...Remind me to take you flying." Hawks stated. He clapped his hands together and rubbed them. "Now, let's start working on *your* defense, yeah?"

Tokoyami thought back to his defeat at Bakugo's hands at the Festival and nodded.

Less than one minute later he found himself staring up at the ceiling, flat on his back like an upturned turtle. Hawks grinned down at him and the petulant part of Tokoyami wanted to glare at him.

"Lesson one: footing." Hawks chirped. "Be mindful of your center of balance or it'll be easy to knock you off your feet."

He held out a hand and Tokoyami begrudgingly took it, allowing himself to be pulled to his feet. Hawks showed him a firmer stance that was more likely to prevent him from being thrown onto his back.

It was difficult not to instinctively summon Dark Shadow every time he was attacked, but Tokoyami knew using his Quirk was not the point of this exercise. The one time he did accidentally send Dark Shadow careening at Hawks, that point was proven. Hawks easily avoided the attack and knocked Tokoyami down for the thousandth time. He caught him before he hit the mat and gently pulled him back onto his feet.

"And *that* is why we need to work on your defense. If Dark Shadow is compromised or you opponent is quick enough, you need at least the basics to be able to defend yourself." His eyes glazed slightly but he shook himself. "Power isn't everything. Use your speed and your head to your advantage."

They spent the next hour working on how to break out of chokeholds and pins on his own before bringing Dark Shadow back into the mix. Tokoyami found that even with power and some speed, he still had far to go as he failed to make Hawks hit the mat even once. Still, he could feel himself improving.

"Hawks."

Tokoyami jumped and whirled, summoning Dark Shadow on instinct. Hawks clapped a hand on his shoulder, holding him back, and he spotted Mockingjay leaning against the wall. How long had she been there? She pushed away from her spot and approached, arms crossed.

"You should take a breather."

Hawks immediately looked at Tokoyami, brow pinched worriedly. "Oh, shoot. I'm not overworking you, am I?"

Tokoyami opened his mouth to say he was fine but never got the chance.

"I'm not talking about him." Mockingjay interjected. "*You're* the one who's paler than a ghost."

Tokoyami did a double take and scrutinized Hawks more carefully. Under the lights of the training room, he belatedly noticed how exhausted Hawks looked. Dark bags were visible even through his visor, and his skin was indeed three shades too pale. Tokoyami recalled that his mentor had been missing less than a week ago and felt a twinge of guilt. He should have been more observant.

"I'll take over his training." Mockingjay continued. "Long range is my strong suit but I am acceptable in close quarters."

"Mockingjay usually uses a mix of martial arts and her bow to smack people." Hawks explained brightly.

Tokoyami eyed said bow warily. Mockingjay rolled her eyes but did not remove it or her quiver from her back. They stepped up to the mat while Hawks fell back, taking Mockingjay's place against the wall. Tokoyami kept his eyes on his new teacher. He had a feeling she would not be as nice as Hawks.

Five seconds later, he was proven right as Mockingjay easily pinned him with her bow across his throat. Tokoyami struggled briefly but could not get her off of him. Mockingjay was about Hawks' size, which was still bigger than Tokoyami, and he felt that difference as she kept just enough pressure to make him uncomfortable. He wrapped his legs around her as Hawks taught him and twisted, yanking her off and she rolled to her feet.

"Better." she commented. Tokoyami made to rise but she knocked his feet from under him, reuniting him with the mat. "But still needs work."

Tokoyami scowled and struggled, but failed to break free again.

A sharp, frantic inhalation had them both looking at Hawks.

He was staring at them like he'd seen a ghost, golden eyes glassy. A shudder passed through him and his gaze dropped to his hands. He flexed his fingers, blinked with his human eyelids, and his lips twisted into a frown. His gaze darted about in confusion as his feathers fluffed up, and Tokoyami could see the lack of recognition in his eyes.

Those eyes never stopped moving, passing over Mockingjay as if she was not there and settling on Tokoyami. His skin drained of color and he flinched, curling in on himself. His breath came in sharp pants as he pressed a hand to his chest. Mockingjay stepped forward and glazed golden eyes snapped back to her. She raised her hands in a peaceful gesture.

"Hawks, you're at your Agency with me, Katniss." she said levelly. "I'm going to touch your shoulder, okay?" She gently did so. "Can you feel my hand?"

Hawks nodded sharply, flinched like a startled bird, and shrank in on himself further as if he wanted to disappear. His hand jerked up to grasp hers and she let him clutch at her fingers.

"My gloves are made from leather." Mockingjay continued calmly. "Can you feel the material?"

Hawks nodded, but his breathing was sharp.

Mockingjay remained calm as she continued to talk to him, asking if he needed anything and giving him something to focus on.

Tokoyami… was completely useless.

As he watched Mockingjay continue to comfort Hawks, Tokoyami realized this helplessness was worse than any he had felt before. He had training in his Quirk, and knew how to perform basic first aid, but the sight of someone becoming so trapped inside their negative thoughts left his body frozen and mind blank as he tried and failed to think of what to do.

In the end, he stood and *uselessly* watched as Mockingjay talked to Hawks until his breathing evened out and the color returned to his face.

He flinched and shook his head as if to clear it. "I'm fine." he panted, gently pushing Mockingjay away. "D-Didn't mean for that to happen. Sorry for scaring you, Tokoyami."

You *were the one who seemed frightened*, Tokoyami thought. It was almost like he had been a different person. Like he was not the one in control…

Oh.

"Hawks-sensei..." he began hesitantly before pausing. Was it appropriate to ask?

Golden eyes scrutinized him and softened. "How about we take a break from physical training and talk about how to deal with someone who is panicking, yeah?"

XXXXXXX

"*I'm so sorry."* Red whispered. *"I didn't think I'd take control so suddenly."*

It's not your fault. I didn't think seeing Tokoyami pinned would trigger you, Hawks thought. His chest still felt constricted from his— or Red's?— earlier… issues. He did not want to call it a panic attack. *Were you two close?*

"*We were friends."* she said briefly, but Hawks could feel her grief.

What happened? Hawks did not mean to ask, but his mind worked against him, asking the question with no way for him to take it back.

Red tried not to answer, but her thoughts were open and exposed like a gaping wound and she could not hide the truth from them.

"*I watched him die."*

Chapter End Notes

I know people always grumble about the students not getting credit or for getting into trouble in canon but meanwhile I am over here half-waiting for the students to do something that causes everything to go wrong because they broke the rules. Is it just me, or does it seem like that's going to happen in the manga? Seriously. I think I see foreshadowing that the kids will act on their own or against orders and things go horribly wrong. Am I the only one thinking this?!?!
Anyway, here Iida and Todoroki have even less of an excuse because Hawks is an over-prepared (paranoid) bird and gave his interns twenty ways to contact him the instant things go south. So yeah. Hawks is not a happy bird (and the voices are not happy time travelers).

Someone to Listen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Day Two

When she first offered her home to him, Miruko had predicted it would be a cold day in hell before Hawks slept at her apartment instead of his office. A couch was a couch and despite his dreams of relaxation, Hawks was a workaholic through and through. But apparently it was blizzarding down in the underworld because he actually appeared last night once his shift was done, collapsing on the couch before she could ask if he ate dinner. Even more surprising, he was still there when she woke at four in the morning.

She stood at the edge of her kitchenette and watched him stare at the eggs he was cooking, spatula in hand. He glanced at her and nodded before continuing to watch his eggs with glassy eyes. Once Miruko might have thought he was simply tired. Now, she wondered if he was on the verge of "drifting" so she lingered close to make sure he did not burn the food.

"Hey. You're up early, even for you."

Again he glanced at her but said nothing.

Miruko peeked over his shoulder. "What'cha cooking?"

Hawks shrugged.

Miruko bit back the urge to tell him to speak. Something she had learned over the past few days was that the chatterbox she once knew wasn't always such a chatterbox anymore. Sometimes Hawks simply did not want to speak, or maybe forgot that he should— or could? Instead he responded non-verbally with nods and shakes of his head, or shrugs.

Now he stared at the eggs with an unnecessary intensity, as if he feared they would vanish if he looked away. When he moved, it was rigidly, his wings stiff and fluffed. His left hand smacked into the edge of the countertop twice, and his wings flared and nearly knocked into something three times.

Each time he paused and stood in place, features twisting like he could not decide whether to cry, throw something, or scream in frustration. That did not worry Miruko as much as when he'd catch sight of his wings and freeze, staring at them like he was not sure they were there.

Unbidden, his scream at the hospital echoed in her mind.

"They cut off my wings!"

Miruko touched her right rabbit ear and repressed a shudder.

The eggs cooked and Hawks turned off the stove without incident. He shuffled to the cupboard and handed her a plate before he sat down. He reached for a cup but his hand twitched, smacking into the glass and dumping its contents on the floor. He watched it drip for a time and if Miruko did not know him better she'd swear he was going to cry.

She reached for a napkin but his expression twisted, making her pause. He reached out with the timidity of a calf that was unsteady on its legs and grabbed the cup, carefully putting it in an upright position. Most of the liquid was already on the table and tile. That done, he silently laid his head in his arms.

"You're not having the best morning, are you?" Miruko murmured. "Need me to cover for you?"

He shook his head, then flinched and looked up, mouth moving.

"You're not speaking again." Miruko said quietly.

Pale cheeks reddened. "Sorry. I said I'm fine now."

He deftly picked up his utensils and ate without more problems.

XXXXXXX

"*We're so uncoordinated."* Purple groaned. *"We need to do better."*

"*Well, maybe if Orange hadn't kept trying to take control—"* Yellow began.

"*Shut the hell up! It's not my fault the stupid glass got in the way!"* Orange snapped.

"*Sorry about the mess, Gold."* Green apologized.

It's okay, Hawks assured them as he went into the bathroom and took an aspirin. *We'll keep trying.*

XXXXXXX

Hawks had been to a lot of ghastly places, but this facility took the cake. The walls were a pristine white, as were the floors, giving it the look of an everyday hospital. Everyday hospitals did not have scratch marks on the floors and walls, as if people had been dragged off while clinging desperately to them. The lights flickered and he glanced worriedly at his companion.

"Dark Shadow and I are fine." Tokoyami assured him quickly. He glanced at the ceiling as the lights flickered again. "Still, let us hurry. It is not wise to linger."

Hawks nodded and they hurried down the hall as the lights flickered and droned. Tokoyami appeared unbothered by the darkness, and Dark Shadow remained calm, but he was tempted to make a light just in case. He twirled the spear in his hand experimentally before placing it in the holster on his back, then rechecked his gun. He felt a familiar pang of loss as he clicked the plasma bullets back into their chamber but pushed his grief away.

Mei may be gone, but her work would keep others alive. He had to believe that.

“We just need to free the prisoners and get out.”

“Should we try to sabotage the operations?” Tokoyami questioned.

Hawks considered it. “If we can.”

Something creaked and groaned, as if a heavy metal beam had shifted. Hawks stepped closer to Tokoyami. The lights flickered and Hawks imagined Kaminari would crack a joke about dramatics if he were here. Hawks may question their enemy's priorities but knew this facility was not the main lab. That lay below the hospital if their intel was to be believed.

Hawks *had* to believe it. Deku did not approve of this mission. He wanted to wait and make sure they had all the facts. Hawks could not wait. They would never have all the facts and the longer they delayed, the more their chances of saving everyone dwindled.

They reached the cafeteria, and with it the seemingly-normal vending machine detailed in the report. Expired snacks filled it from top to bottom, their packaging faded from years of being left there. Hawks carefully pressed the buttons and the machine beeped. Old mechanisms groaned and the machine slid aside, pulling cobwebs in its wake.

The stench of old, musty air struck his nose and he and Tokoyami peered into the darkness. A rickety metal ladder led downward. Tokoyami went first as Dark Shadow kept watch, twitching in the darkness but showing little increased aggression otherwise. Hawks followed after and his landing brought up puffs of dust and dirt. He frowned and checked the bottom of his shoes.

“It has been a while since anyone has been here...”

“Or it’s been a while since this entrance was used.” Tokoyami offered. He cocked his head. “Please do not make me be the optimistic one in this situation.”

“That would be strange.” Hawks said with forced lightness.

The tunnel they landed in was dark. Hawks did not dare to turn on a light. The hall was too thin— scarcely wide enough for someone on a gurney to be pushed through— and if they were found here there would be little room for maneuverability.

So they crept through the dark with Dark Shadow leading the way, peeking around corners and slipping under doors to scout the inside. As Dark Shadow reported “empty” again and again and again, Hawks’s sense of unease tripled. They should have run into enemy forces by now. Why would Ujiko leave one of his facilities so unguarded?

Dark Shadow slid under another door and immediately emerged. “It’s the main lab.”

Tokoyami’s feathers fluffed up. *Why didn’t Hawks wings do the sa—* ~~*Where were his wings? His body felt wrong—*~~ He looked at Hawks and hesitated. “Are you ready?”

Hawks's bad feeling tripled— She should have listened to her gut. — but she nodded. "Ready."

Dark Shadow forced the door open. She and Tokoyami sprang through, ready to fight, but no Nomu or villains leaped at them from the darkness.

Hawks created a flashlight and turned it on. Around them were shattered glass containers that looked like the remnants of pods. A quick scan of the mechanisms at their base proved that was the case. He spotted methods for tracking growth, vitals, and brain activity along with ways to measure the cohesion of each injected Quirk.

A light green substance stained the floor, speckled with splotches of dried blood like a macabre painting. Hawks's skin crawled but he forced himself to look around for a computer. Her gaze rested on the far wall, where something had obviously been removed, leaving a few wires behind.

Hawks's heart sank. "They took their research with them."

"Of course they did." Tokoyami sighed. "But the intel says people are still here, in cryostasis. We need to find them."

He walked across the room to another door and used Dark Shadow to force it open. Immediately he froze and stepped back.

"Momo…" Tokoyami breathed.

Hawks joined him in the doorway and covered her mouth. The next room was not another lab — at least, she prayed it wasn't.

It was a morgue.

Bodies lay under dirty white sheets and the smell of decomposition tickled her nostrils, making her want to gag. A layer of dirt and grime covered everything, from the tools to the sheets to the lights handing from the ceiling, showing this place had not been touched for months.

They had found the people they came to rescue.

But they were not in cryostasis as the reports said.

They were already dead.

They had been for a while.

For longer than the information that there were people to rescue claimed.

The hair on Hawks's nape stood up.

He got his shield up just in time.

The Nomu's strike dented the metal and sent him flying backwards. Hawks crashed through a window and landed in the shattered glass. He bit his lip to hold back a scream as pieces bit into his back and palms but he pushed himself up, ignoring the rivulets of blood dripping over his exposed skin. A quick scan revealed a thin, lithe monstrosity with its brain exposed. Four dull eyes stared unseeingly at him and he noted the lack of ears.

It's not her.

He sprang for the Nomu and stabbed it through the eye, plunging his spear directly into its brain. It fell soundlessly. Hawks stabbed it twice more just to make sure it stayed down. He brushed his dark hair out of his face and winced.

"Are you alright?"

"I should be the one asking that." Tokoyami lectured. He checked her back and grimaced. "We should go. This was only a decoy. There's nothing here."

Hawks hesitated, a protest on his lips.

Tokoyami's sharp features softened. "We'll find her."

She relented. "Okay."

They ran out of the lab, leaving the shattered containers behind. Hawks's flashlight flicked up and down as she carried it so he clipped it to her belt to lessen its erratic movement. Her heart ached and her throat felt taut but she did not dwell on her failure.

She and Tokoyami had come all this way for nothing. They had snuck off without telling Deku for *nothing*. This was not like what she had done when she was a first year at UA, where going after Bakugo had been the right choice. There was no rescue, no saving, *no* reason for them to be here—

Hawks put his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder.

The wall exploded inward. Shrapnel peppered Hawks's skin, only missing her vitals due to the shield she still carried. He hit the floor and bit back a scream, twisting back onto her feet as she aimed her weapon at the Nomu.

Her arm fell limply to her side.

The Nomu in front of her had clearly been a female. The curves on its blackened, mutilated body was evidence enough for that. But it was not that figure that made her freeze as the will to fight drained from her limbs.

The Nomu's earlobes were long, ending in familiar jacks.

It stared directly at her, and unlike the blank-eyed Nomu from the morgue, this one's eyes held emotion: *Hatred*.

"Your fault," it hissed, voice warped and guttural. "Your fault."

Hawks's eyes filled with tears. "*Jiro*..."

The Nomu came at her with a roar. She barely dodged, forced to use her already-dented shield to deflect the Nomu's strike.

"Jiro, *please*!" she begged. "It's me! Your friend!"

The Nomu *shrieked* at him and he flinched as warm liquid trickled from her ears. Hawks forced herself onto her feet and yanked a Quirk suppression collar out of her stomach. He ignored the wave of dizziness and stumbled to his feet.

"Tokoyami..."

Tokoyami's red eyes were cold. "On it."

He cloaked himself in Dark Shadow and lunged for the Nomu. It went to meet him but he abruptly broke free of his Quirk's hold, falling back and letting Dark Shadow slam into it at full speed. The Nomu shrieked but Dark Shadow hardly flinched, wrapping around it like living rope and lifting it into the air.

We'll help you. We'll help you. ~~*Ẅ̈ĕ̈ l̈l̈ ḧël̈p̈ ÿöül̈*~~

Hawks threw the Quirk suppressing collar at Tokoyami and he caught it with practiced ease. The Nomu seemed to recognize the device for it struggled harder, its shrieks growing more and more painful in pitch. Hawks took his eyes off it just long enough to create two sets of ear plugs— ~~*I'm glad she's such a stupid nomu*~~

Light exploded from the Nomu like lava breaking through the surface of the earth— *She was so stupid to not think about other potential Quirks. So stupid so foolish* ~~*sc̈r̈ëc̈k̈l̈ëš*~~ Dark Shadow released it with a pained scream.

The skin on the Nomu's shins warped, transforming into speakers. Hawks flinched back but there was nowhere to dodge. The blast of sound shattered the stone around them, sending bits of mortar crumbling down. Hawks rolled out of the way of the debris, covering her head as a chunk of rock missed her arm by an inch.

Something heavy and sharp landed on her leg. She heard a sharp *crack* before she felt it. Her scream echoed through the empty tunnels but Tokoyami's scream was louder. She looked up and Tokoyami was pinned by the Nomu. Dark Shadow slashed at it but its wounds healed quicker than he could make them. He may as well be a feather batting against a steel wall.

The Nomu's maw opened and magma-like light glowed deep in its throat. A single flare was all it took and Dark Shadow disintegrated with a scream. Tokoyami's body went rigid and his eyes rolled back, his limbs jerking as if he were having a seizure.

The Nomu watched him shudder for a moment and looked directly at Hawks. Then its gaze jerked back to its prey and all consciousness faded from its eyes, leaving only mindless bloodlust. Its jaw opened, revealing sharp, shark-like teeth. Hawks struggled to push herself up but her leg was pinned under debris.

"Jiro, *NO!*" Hawks screamed.

The Nomu did not so much as pause.

Tokoyami looked at her, and hollow acceptance dulled the fear in his eyes.

Then Jiro's Nomu ripped out his throat—

Hawks woke screaming.

He clapped his hands over his mouth to muffle it and lurched behind the object he lay on— a couch? He crouched behind it, mouth still covered and chest heaving as he tried to figure out where he was.

His fingers clenched and he realized he had a strange gun in his hand. Its design was unlike anything he had seen before, because unlike normal guns this one glowed at its barrel like it had a small, blue light stored inside it. Where had he gotten it?

Hawks lost track of his questions as the voices bubbled up. Tokoyami's face bombarded his mind's eye, throat torn and eyes glassy, and they knew he was going to be sick. Hawks crashed into the wall on his way to the bathroom and barely made it to the toilet before he emptied his stomach. The voices' disgust joined the maddening grip of their horror and Hawks vomited again, barely able to breathe.

Eventually he slumped against the bathroom counter and might have felt relieved that Miruko was still at her office. It was difficult to say because the emotion— Was it *real*?— was swallowed by their collective grief and terror.

"*I never— That was— I—"* Green could barely string two words together before he was pulled back into the images of Tokoyami's body.

Hawks swallowed another gag. He was sure he would never be able to purge that from his mind. Now he understood why the voices were so adamant about keeping things to themselves. If *this* was what happened when they tried to tell him anything… he was not sure any of them would be able to function.

How did you survive? Hawks did not mean to ask the question, but it— everything— was out of his control.

"*I can't."* Red— Momo?— croaked.

She fled.

The other voices hastily joined her behind their rebuilt walls, leaving something close to silence in Hawks head.

Hawks hesitantly picked up the gun Red had created and wondered where he could hide it. It would be stupid to throw it away. It was obviously an advanced future model, and the last thing he needed was for someone to get their hands on it. He eventually stuffed it inside a box of his underwear. He'd have to find a better place for it later.

He belatedly noticed most of his feathers had fallen to the floor and hastily reattached them, obsessively checking to make sure none had been left laying around. That done, he huddled on the couch and clutched at his hair, rocking back and forth. Even without the voices, Hawks head was crowded with thoughts that were not his own. Some were— they had to be — but he could not genuinely tell if they were his or if the voices were affecting him even now.

He was so damn *useless*. He was supposed to save the world but the voices would not tell him how to do it. He also couldn't tell anyone without being seen as crazy at best, a spy at worst. Not only that, but he was apparently getting some memories from the time travelers in his head. Hawks could not talk with them about it without being pulled into their trauma. Even worse, he was getting their memories and recalled them so clearly *he could almost mistake them for his own.*

What if it got worse and he could not see the difference between them anymore?

Hawks could feel panic choking him and he prayed it was only his own. It had to be his own, right? The voices were behind their wall, recuperating after sharing that awful memory. It had to be *his* panic, no one else's, because he was Hawks and not Red and he didn't watch his teammate die—

Intern. *Intern*, not teammate. Tokoyami was his— Hawks, the Winged Hero's— *intern*. Not his teammate or classmate or friend—

Shit.

His fingers gripped a few feathers but he forced his fingers open before he could yank them out. He could not give in to his instincts. He needed another outlet.

'*Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face. You are a hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

That was what his handlers at the Commission always told him. He would be a Hero, and heroes never let their smile fall. Yet here he was, rocking back and forth with tears in his eyes and his teeth clenched in a pained frown. At least no one was there to see it. No one except the voices, whose memories he was now able to see in his dreams. When he wanted answers, he did not mean like *this*.

Hawks shut his eyes and tried to force Red's memories away. Rather than fade, the memories grew clearer until he could smell the lab. Hawks's skin crawled and he scrubbed non-existent blood from his arms. He needed someone to talk to. *Anyone*.

Rumi and Katniss were out. They were amazing but they'd come to all the wrong conclusions. Or they'd burn the world down. That was a possibility too.

There was no way in hell he'd talk with any of his interns about this. Especially not Tokoyami. Absolutely *not*.

...There was no one else.

He didn't have *anyone* else.

Does anyone really need me?

The pain in his chest was so sharp Hawks briefly thought he'd been stabbed. He slumped on the couch and stared blankly at the ceiling, not even blinking with his third eyelid. He had eight people in his head, but the crushing loneliness he felt left him breathless.

Desperate, he fumbled for his new phone and scrolled through the contacts. Rumi, Katniss, his interns, other Pro Heroes for work though the Commission's number was conveniently not there so he could not know they were calling, *really*. The only outlier was the most recent addition to his list.

Toshinori Yagi.

Hawks pressed call.

The phone rang once. Twice. Three times—

'*Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face. You are a hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

I shouldn't talk to anyone.

Hawks' stomach twisted into knots but before he could hang up, the phone stopped ringing.

"*Hello?"* The voice that came through was gruff but soothing in a way that was almost familiar.

Hawks felt himself relax. He instantly tensed up again as the voices *jolted* in the back of his mind, as if they had peered out before slamming the door shut, accidentally hitting him in the head in the process.

"*Hello?"* Yagi asked again. *"Is anyone there?"*

Hawks could only make a small gasping sound as he released a shuddering breath.

Yagi immediately grew concerned. *"Are you okay? Do you need help?"*

"No." Hawks forced out. He glanced at the clock and flinched. "I'm so sorry. I didn't think about the time—"

"*Hey, hey. It's alright. Calm down."* Yagi soothed as if Hawks had not called him at two in the morning. *"You're Hawks, right? All Might said you might call me."*

Despite the man's kind tone, Hawks regretted every decision he had made in the past few minutes. What the hell had he been *thinking,* calling Yagi like this? *Great first impression, Hawks. Ten out of ten on the awkward scale.* "Uh. Right. I thought you might have forgotten…"

"I haven't." Yagi reassured him.

The paranoid side of Hawks wondered if this was some kind of trick or sick joke. It had to be, right? Who would be kind enough to react so pleasantly after being woken by a stranger's phone call in the middle of the night?

"Um." Hawks said intelligently, because even with all his socialization skills he was abruptly at a loss for words. He realized he was still waiting to be yelled at and his cheeks turned red with shame. At least Yagi could not see him.

"*How about I introduce myself?"* Yagi offered. *"I'm Toshinori Yagi. I work with All Might at his agency. I love animals, meat buns, and movies— Oh, have you seen that new sequel to the* ***Super Space Spirit Saga*** *trilogy? It's quite good in my opinion."*

They were step-by-step rudimentary introductions and Hawks's stomach twisted into embarrassed pretzels at being forced to fall back on them.

"I'm Hawks." he said, and hoped Yagi could not tell how small his voice was because *he should be better than this*. "My favorite food is chicken. I… I haven't seen movies in a long time. Not in the theater, anyway. No time. I've seen the other *Space Saga* movies though. Rumi— Er, Miruko had me watch them."

He remembered the movies clearly. He had been overworking himself, as usual, and she pretended to want to do a mission together. 'Research' for that 'mission' involved a marathon of all twelve of the *Super Space Spirit Saga* movies, only stopping for bathroom breaks. He was sure the soda stain from Miruko's colossal trip was still on the edge of the carpet.

"*I won't spoil you then."* Yagi said lightly. *"You should be careful though. One of my younger friends has been showing me how to use Yotube and every comment section has spoilers plastered everywhere. As All Might would say: 'Don't spoil movies. Only villains do that'."*

Hawks found himself chuckling and wondered if that was Yagi's plan. "I'll be careful." He looked at his body and forced his gaze away because no, he was *not* covered in Tokoyami's blood. "Do you want to talk about the other movies or what?"

"We can talk about anything you like." Yagi encouraged.

I want to talk about how I have eight people from the future in my head who can take control of my body and who I am getting memories from to the point where I keep forgetting they're not my memories and this is the first time that's happened but it's already so bad I think I might forget who I am even more than I already have and did you know I don't remember my own name so that identity-loss thing is probably going to get worse because of this and—

"I can't." Hawks choked.

"*Okay."* Yagi agreed immediately. *"But just know you can talk to me about anything once you are ready. I am not a therapist but I will never share your information with anyone unless I fear you are in grave danger."*

“Not even All Might?” Hawks questioned.

“*Not even All Might.”* Yagi promised.

Hawks felt the voices shift inside his mind and shuddered. “Even if it’s...” *Terrifying unbelievable crazy impossible world-shattering.* “...bad?”

“***Are** you in danger?”* Yagi asked seriously, and Hawks was cruelly reminded that this man worked at a Hero Agency.

He should say no. It was simple to. But instead he paused like an idiot as the voices shifted in his mind, keeping themselves cut off from him. He knew they could hear the conversation though. Their communication was such a one-way street. Except when it wasn’t and he had nightmares about Red’s past. He realized he had been silent for too long and cringed.

“I… I’m home now.” he gave as the worst non-answer ever.

Yagi did not pressure him or demand answers. What had Hawks done to deserve this guy? *Nothing*, except get possessed and run around the woods for a year in a painful panic as he wondered if he had finally lost the last bits of himself—

Hawks forced himself to breathe. The voices were in their walls but he could not afford to drift now. He wondered if he could order his brain to stop overreacting. Maybe Purple could, but that would not help his control issues any.

“*Of course. Is there a particular reason you called now?”* Yagi asked, pulling Hawks out of his spiral.

Hawks felt the voices lingering, listening in but hiding their own thoughts. For a foolish moment, Hawks considered telling Yagi about the voices and Red’s memories of Tokoyami’s grisly death. He honestly did. He shouldn’t even consider it. It was stupid to even do so.

Telling Yagi about his ‘nightmare’ may give him all the wrong ideas, because these memories were not Hawks’ own. But they *felt* like his own, and the affect on him was evident in his trembling hands and hitched breathing. He could feel Red’s terror, her grief, her horror as that *thing* that was once her friend killed her other friend. It was as if those feelings were his own. Except they were *not* his own, so he shouldn’t talk about it because it was not his to share.

Right?

Hawks shut his eyes tightly. “It’s nothing. I just… wanted to hear someone’s voice, I guess. So I called a stranger. Isn’t that dumb?”

“*Not at all. Sometimes a stranger is who you need to listen.”* Yagi said warmly, and okay this guy was a *saint*.

“It’s stupid.” Hawks insisted. His laugh was fake even to his own ears. “I had a night terror—I mean, nightmare. It just freaked me out a bit.”

That was an obvious big fat lie but Yagi did not confront him about it. *"I see. Nightmares are quite common for Heroes. I myself have some frightening dreams from time to time."*

"But it wasn't a dream. It was real." Hawks murmured. "It was real and *it's my fault he*—" He twitched and gripped his hair with his free hand. "Not my fault. It's *not* my fault. I— Er. Sorry. I'm not usually such a mess. I'm having a bit of an identity crisis again." The half-joke was pathetically weak. "I don't remember my name, you kno—" He realized he'd let his guard down and paled. "Oh, *shit*. Forget I said that."

"*Very well."* Yagi agreed, lying for the first time.

He would not forget. Not because he was the nosy type, but because he was nice and Hawks let something concerning slip like the dumbass he was. At this rate he might as well jump off a building before the Commission shoved him over the edge with clamps around his wings.

"Do you ever get… really tired of trying?" he asked, not quite rhetorically. "Like nothing you do matters so you may as well just go along for the ride until the end?"

"*That is a morbid way of thinking."* Yagi said without judgment.

Hawks chuckled without humor. "I'm in a morbid mood. Gotta keep smiling though."

"*Not around me."* Yagi said firmly.

Again, Hawks found himself at a loss for words. "Are you sure you're a real person? You're way too nice and not-judgy."

"*It seems you need someone nice and 'not-judgy'."*

"Yeah." Hawks mumbled.

The panic was still there but it was less overwhelming and more manageable. Yagi was surprisingly easy to talk to. That must be why All Might recommended him. Did he have some type of calming Quirk or something? Hawks didn't ask, partly because it would be rude and partly because he was not sure he could handle even the most benign of mental manipulations at the moment.

Still, it took surprising effort not to blurt everything to Yagi. About the voices, the future, the memories, the Commission, his lost feelings. He could not do that, even if he wanted to. The voices were holding back but he could feel their warnings that Yagi would not believe him. Besides, he had never even talked to the guy before today. There was no way he could just dump his problems onto him.

(Right?)

Hawks was stupid for even thinking about it.

"It was nice talking to you, Yagi-san."

"*Please, call me Toshinori if you'd like."* he insisted.

“Okay, Toshinori.” Hawks said haltingly. “Thank you for listening.”

“*You’re welcome.”* Toshinori said warmly. *“Call me anytime.”*

Hawks murmured a goodbye and hung up, feeling just a bit better than when he made the call. A presence shifted in his mind and he tensed as Green’s emotions jabbed at his consciousness.

“*Hawks…”* Green’s voice was soft. *“...We’re sorry for cutting you out so much. We’ll tell you what happens next after we rescue Eri.”*

His guilt was too strong for Hawks to feel any type of victory or satisfaction. Instead he let his numb exhaustion be his response and crawled back into bed.

He slept through the rest of the night, but his nightmares were filled with his intern’s bloodstained face.

XXXXXXX

A lot of progress had been made inside Hawks’s head. So much so, that Midoriya could almost forget that they were in someone else’s mind. The rickety cottage they had started with had transformed into a suitable living space that looked too much like UA’s dorms. Midoriya knew it was because they all subconsciously equated their old school with ‘safety’, though none of them admitted as much aloud.

As they sat in a recreation of the common room, Midoriya realized how much seeing his body mattered to him. He hastily shoved away thoughts of Hagakure and was more than a little relieved when the others did not comment on it. Something must have shown in his expression because Shinso sent him a measured look.

“It seems our mental walls are holding.” he murmured, as if he feared speaking too loudly would make the world shatter. Considering their circumstances, it just might.

“For now.” Kaminari said in an equally soft voice. He glanced towards Yaoyorozu’s room and away. “Not that it’ll help much if we go down memory lane again.”

Midoriya’s stomach twisted into knots and the walls around them shuddered. A crack rippled up one of the walls and across the ceiling.

“Never mind.” Kaminari sighed.

Midoriya grimaced. “Sorry. I guess our walls still need work.”

“No shit.” Bakugo spat, more frustrated than angry.

“Then we’ll keep rebuilding.” Uraraka said. Flickers of her determination rippled through them and instantly transformed into guilt-fueled alarm. “Oops.”

“Let’s keep our heads.” Iida interjected quickly. “We don’t want to have to build from nothing.”

"*Again*." Bakugo muttered.

The crack across the ceiling grew bigger.

"Oh, *forget* this." Kaminari groaned. "We all know we're upset because of Tokoyami. And All M—"

Part of the ceiling collapsed. Midoriya watched it crumble with exhausted apathy and rubbed his eyes. Bakugo stood up and walked out of the room as the floor cracked in his wake. He did not retreat fast enough to hide his emotions and although Midoriya and the others pretended not to notice, he knew that they did and was upset they did just like he was upset that—

Don't spiral, Midoriya begged himself.

"We've improved." Uraraka forced out optimistically. "Hawks shouldn't hear us right now."

"He's probably getting echoes of our feelings though." Kaminari poked his head out the window and instantly retreated. "Actually, he's having another nightmare."

Flashes of Tokoyami's bloody body— both teenaged and adult— forced themselves into Midoriya's mind, flashing between the two forms like a morbid photo reel. He heard Yaoyorozu sob. Midoriya put his head in his hands and pulled at his hair. Hair which was only a manifestation since he was trapped in Hawks's head now and no amount of building would change that—

Calm down. Breathe. With your ***nonexistent lungs—***

"Okay, we are *going to talk!*" Kaminari shouted. Pieces of the room did not stop falling around them but he continued. "Hawks talked to Toshinori. We all heard it. We should tell him the truth that Toshinori is All Might."

"No." Midoriya said instantly. "Hawks *needs* someone to talk to. You felt what he did when he woke up. He's *terrified*."

"I know. That's why you agreed to tell him about what happens in the future." Kaminari's features were uncharacteristically hard. "But you *still* want to keep All Might's secret from him? You know he'll find out eventually. How the hell would that end well?"

Midoriya's shoulders slumped. Despite his efforts to keep them to himself, his feelings rippled through the others as he recalled Hawks's deep-seated loneliness and desperation. Even with their minds so exposed, none of them had realized how badly their circumstances and secrets were affecting their host. He was honestly surprised Hawks had not had a complete mental breakdown yet.

Could it be his Quirk helped him cope? He had the ability to control individual feathers and sense each one, letting his mind split its attention, in a way. Was that the reason why he had not broken or lost his mind when they appeared inside it—?

"Nice theories but could you focus, please?" Shinso asked, voice strained.

Midoriya winced. “Sorry. The point is… we’re isolating him due to our secrets. Worse, we’re *hurting* him because of it. He needs an outlet or...”

“We can’t let him tell Toshinori the truth.” White interjected.

“But we can let him talk about other things that are bothering him.” Midoriya argued.

“Maybe so, but Yellow is right.” Iida said, using Kaminari’s codename even in here. “If we don’t tell him All Might and Toshinori are one and the same, he will be hurt later.”

“But if we tell him, he’ll lose the only person he feels he can talk to.” Midoriya shot back. His fingers clenched but he felt no pain as his nails dug into his palms. Yet another sign this was not the real world. “We’ve already taken so much from him. We can’t take that from him too.”

“This will only end in tears.” Iida predicted lowly.

“Maybe not.” Uraraka said with genuine optimism. “We all know All Might. He’s not keeping his identity a secret for malicious reasons. He genuinely wants to help Hawks.”

“That’s true.” Shinso acknowledged. His tired eyes darkened. “But will Hawks see it that way? Or will he see it as yet another secret we keep ‘for his own good’?”

XXXXXXX

Day Three

Todoroki did not like the feeling of being behind. He had always been ahead of his peers, and although he had only missed a few days of his internship, the fact that he missed it at all left him feeling discontent. He supposed it was not the worst punishment for his actions. Not by a long shot.

During his thankfully short hospital stay, Todoroki had come to a realization. Their actions were right, but how they did things were wrong. In hindsight, he *should* have called Hawks immediately. So why didn’t he? Faith in his own abilities, perhaps misconstrued? A simple lapse in judgment? Or was it pride? Regardless, he tried to take Hawks’s words to heart: he was still a student and still had time to grow and learn.

Hawks met them in the lobby with coffees in hand. He handed a cup to Tokoyami, who instantly took a drink. He muttered something that sounded like ‘the clutches of the bitter night have receded’ and wandered off, sipping as he went.

Watching him, Todoroki questioned if he even knew they were there. Still, that was nothing new. Tokoyami was always a zombie before he had his coffee. Todoroki watched Hawks carefully for his reaction, but he simply looked bemused, though his unblinking gaze stayed on Tokoyami until he vanished from sight.

That did not stop Iida from bowing sharply. “I apologize for my classmate’s rudeness!”

“Eh, it’s fine. I’m not mad.” Hawks chuckled with a vague dismissive motion. His wings flared out slightly and folded against his back as he held up the remaining cups. “I got you some, too.”

Looking carefully at Hawks, Todoroki noticed he looked rather tired. The dark shadows under his eyes were visible even behind his tinted visor. But mentioning that would be rude. Todoroki silently took the offered cup and murmured a thanks before taking a drink. To his surprise, it tasted like his order.

Iida took a sip of his own and startled. "This is… How did you know about my coffee preference?”

“I read you minds.” Hawks chirped. He chuckled at their dumbfounded expressions. “I kid, I kid. I wanted to be sure I got something you liked so I asked your siblings.”

“Why did you not simply ask us?” Iida asked.

“Because it’s more fun this way! I wanted to see the shocked looks on your faces.” Hawks said brightly. “It’s like ‘Oh, he got us coffee. That’s nice, I guess.’ But then it’s your order, exactly the way you like it!” He grinned. “Surprising people like that is great. They get the funniest shocked looks on their faces.”

Todoroki considered his cup carefully. Hawks had to have called Fuyumi since Natsuo was out of town, but still that, was an odd way to approach this. It was almost like those prank videos Kaminari tried to show him, but instead of doing something to scare someone, Hawks did something more positive. He could have simply asked them for their orders but instead made it a surprise just to see their reaction. But… did that effort also mean they had been forgiven for their actions in Hosu? Regardless, it was a nice surprise and Todoroki found himself smiling.

“Thank you, Hawks-sensei.”

Hawks grinned. “No problem. Now, let’s go catch up to Tokoyami, yeah?”

The interns spent the day with the sidekicks.

Todoroki instantly got a new appreciation for what happened around missions. Hawks took care of all the villains and although a part of Todoroki rankled at having none to fight himself, he did not find his duties to be tedious as he feared. Endeavor always acted as if the aftermath was something to be endured out of duty, but Todoroki found himself enjoying the smaller things.

As he carefully helped a gaggle of school children out of an unsafe area and a little boy thanked him by solemnly giving him a piece of candy, Todoroki found himself smiling for the second time that day. He waved goodbye to the child and put the candy in one of the pockets of his costume—

A low **boom** rattled the buildings and smoke spewed from the windows of an isolated tower. Before Todoroki could blink, a blur of red above showed Hawks was on the scene. In an

instant twenty-eight people were on the street, rescued from what appeared to be a burning apartment building. Twelve more joined them as the building filled with fire and smoke.

Todoroki ran towards it and raised his right hand. He could not put out the entire fire but maybe his ice—

"*Don't!*" a sidekick shouted at him. "Shatterpoint says the building isn't stable. Your ice could just cause it to collapse. Let the others handle it."

A part of him rankled at the dismissal but he remembered Hawks's words. There was a time to learn, and this was not the time to do it where errors could be so catastrophic. More feathers evacuated people and a small boy and a man appeared in front of him. The man instantly slumped to the ground and the boy ran to his side with a scream.

"Dad!" Terrified eyes locked onto Todoroki. "Mister Hero! M-My dad is hurt!"

Todoroki hurried to the boy's side and knelt beside him. A quick glance showed he had only been singed, but the way his hair matted to his head with congealed blood suggested a head injury. He needed first aid. Todoroki knew this. He— He *knew* this. An odd haze went over him as he went through the motions to check the man over, stemming the blood with what he had in his first aid kit.

He heard the child sniffling but words of comfort died in his throat. For a moment he panicked. What was he supposed to say? It's going to be okay? Don't worry, for I am here? Your dad will be fine? Everything he thought seemed cliché and fake and as his hands moved with certainty to help the father, his mind hesitated, unable to comfort the child.

Next to him, the child began to wail.

Todoroki still did not know what to say.

A sidekick noticed his dilemma and ran to them. She took the child into her arms, holding the boy and rocking him gently.

"It's okay, little one. Your daddy's going to be fine." she soothed. "See, the paramedics are here to help him, okay?"

She stayed with him and his father as the paramedics arrived, soothing him all the while. Once the medics pushed him away, Todoroki stood uselessly to the side, at a complete loss of what to do. He forced himself to move to other people, hurrying them to safety or medical attention, while other heroes rushed in and put out the fire.

No one had been killed. Most had been safely evacuated before they could be injured in what appeared to be a mundane gas explosion. All in all, it was lucky the Heroes had been close by.

So why did Todoroki feel like he failed?

Later that day, it was time for physical training. Todoroki was more used to using his Quirk than his body, which Hawks seemed determined to rectify much like Tokoyami because he

could not simply rely on his fire and ice. Too many things could prevent him from using them. Iida was tasked with working on his speed and upping how long he could maintain his tougher techniques, and Todoroki wondered how Hawks could train all three of them at once.

His question was answered when Mockingjay arrived and stared at the two returned interns with a disturbingly blank expression. Apparently she was going to help Todoroki while Hawks helped Iida for today.

Tokoyami chuckled lowly and caught Todoroki's eye. "Have fun." he said darkly.

Todoroki wondered what could be 'fun' about training.

He stepped onto the mat.

In less than two seconds, he was on the floor and reconsidering his life choices.

A few hours and some sore spots later, they took a break from acquainting Todoroki and Iida with the floor and went to the agency's kitchen. Todoroki was pleasantly surprised to find some cold soba waiting for him. He dug in, careful not to slurp the noodles as he might at home.

"So do you want to talk hero business or nah?" Hawks asked as he scarfed down an ungodly amount of chicken.

"Of course." Iida proclaimed firmly. "We came here to learn."

"Great!" Hawks said brightly. "So did you think about my questions from day one?"

It took Todoroki a moment to remember what that question was.

"*Why do you want to be a Hero?"*

Earlier that day, Todoroki would still be at a loss for an answer. Now though, he may have an idea. He looked down at his soba.

"There was a boy today, at the fire. His father was hurt. I could not comfort him."

The mood at the table instantly grew somber.

Hawks' gold eyes softened with compassion. "I see. Stuff like that's rough. No one knows the exact future, so there's no way to prevent all tragedy before it occurs. That leaves a lot of scared and hurt people behind." His gaze grew glassy. "Some heroes… deal with it in their own way. They don't lose compassion exactly, but they find it harder to be affected when faced with crying children and mourning families. It's all part of the brain's defense mechanism. In generic terms, it goes 'I can't deal with this anymore' and tries to stop feeling that pain."

"Are you like that?" Todoroki asked quietly.

“No.” Hawks said, equally quiet. “And I hope you never be. I’m not expecting you to be a walking example of empathy to *every* scared person you meet, but don’t *lose* that empathy. Saving people matters, but being a Hero is about more than just number of rescues. We’re symbols, whether we like it or not.”

Todoroki thought he understood. He slowly looked up and met Hawks’s gaze. “When people see me I want them to feel safe and think things are going to be okay.”

Sharp golden eyes scrutinized him. “You want to be able to reassure people with your presence?”

“Yes.” Todoroki decided.

Hawks smiled. “That’s a good goal. Social skills are not something you can just learn in a week though. So you can always call me with questions."

Chapter End Notes

This story has more fan art! This time it’s by flowerpower778, who was amazingly awesome and drew a scene I described in a comment. See it here. (Thank youuuuuuu, flowerpower778! I love it! :D) You can see more of flowerpower778's art on their deviantart account here.

Ready Or Not

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Day Four

Tenya Iida vibrated in excitement as he walked into the Kettle, exactly ten minutes early. His fellow interns at this institution were also early and he felt a bit of accomplishment at that. It was always better to be early than late, and he wanted to continue to make a good impression to make up for his actions earlier in the internship.

In hindsight, Iida didn't know what he had been thinking. Well, in truth he did. He just never realized he was capable of such anger. He acted recklessly and Todoroki and Midoriya nearly paid the price for his foolish decisions.

He would strive to be better.

For his classmates, his family, and himself.

A new face was talking to the receptionist at the front desk, and Iida identified her as the Rabbit Hero: Miruko, currently ranked Number Five on the Hero billboards. Hawks was noticeably absent.

Iida frowned. “That’s strange. Hawks usually meets us down here.”

“Maybe he’s still in his office?” Todoroki mentioned. “He had a lot of reports to do.”

“Coffee.” Tokoyami mumbled.

Miruko looked their way as they approached and sauntered over to meet them halfway. “What perfect timing.” Critical red eyes scanned each of them, glittering with something Iida could not place. “So you’re Hawks's interns. I’m Miruko. Nice to meet ya.”

Iida, Tokoyami, and Todoroki all bowed in greeting.

“Good morning, Miruko.” Iida greeted formally.

“Why are you here?” Todoroki asked bluntly.

Iida shot him a scandalized look.

Miruko did not seem bothered by his lack of respect. She grinned wickedly. "I'm here to teach you more techniques than 'kick the villain *really* hard'."

Her grin reminded Iida of Bakugo's but with less anger. That mattered little since the promise of a merciless loss was enough of a comparison for him to be wary.

“How do you know Hawks-sensei?” Todoroki asked.

Miruko blinked and cooed. “Aww, you call him ‘Hawks-*sensei*’? My Baby Bird has grown up so fast!”

Todoroki’s brow furrowed. “Hawks is not a baby bird.”

Miruko chuckled and flipped a lock of white hair over her shoulder. “It’s just a nickname, kid.”

Todoroki nodded slowly. "Are you close?"

Iida wanted to hiss that it was not their business and rather impolite to ask but Miruko did not look offended by the personal question. Huh. She was rather like Hawks in that regard.

"He's like my little brother.” she said with a shrug. “He makes me make friends and I stop him from doing stupid shit."

Iida thought back to Stain. "He has passed your lessons on to us."

Miruko barked a laugh. “More like he has done and seen me do enough stupid shit to tell you what not to do. ‘*Hawks-sensei*.’” She cackled lowly.

Iida wondered if she was being insulting. After a moment’s consideration, he doubted it. Tensei was much older than him so they did not have the usual sibling relationship, but he knew from observation that some sibling-types ribbed each other all the time.

Todoroki looked rather morose. “I see. You are lucky to have such a close bond like that.”

Iida saw nothing odd about that statement but Miruko did a double-take and shot him a befuddled look. "I thought you had siblings?"

Todoroki fiddled with his costume. "I do. We… did not interact much. Father did not want us to."

Her red eyes narrowed. “Interesting.” She turned back to the receptionist. “So did Hawks sleep in his office again?”

“Did the sun rise?” the woman asked tiredly.

Miruko sighed. “Here’s some advice, kiddies: Sleep at home. Try to get at least five hours. You’ll feel better for it.”

“We will use that advice.” Iida said seriously as he made a mental note to write it down.

“So serious.” Miruko muttered. She led the way to the elevator and pressed the button, ushering them inside. “I was supposed to meet you up top but it seems Hawks slept in. Let’s go wake him, yeah?” The way her eyes glittered suggested it would not be a kind awakening.

Iida considered keeping quiet but his sense of morals won out. “I do not believe that would be appropriate. Hawks works very hard.”

“He was exhausted yesterday.” Todoroki added. “I could see the bags under his eyes.”

Miruko frowned. “Great. Guess I’ll have to talk to him about taking caring for himself aga —”

The elevator doors opened to reveal the absent Hawks.

He was laying unconscious on his office floor.

XXXXXXX

Hawks woke to the unwelcome sight of three panicking interns and one less-panicking Miruko. Well, Iida was the closest to panicking while Tokoyami and Todoroki settled on— apparently— trying to figure out if he was dead. Wonderful. At least Mockingjay was not here. She would already have dropped him off at the hospital and would be halfway done beating up the ones responsible for him overworking himself— as in the Hero Commission, probably.

Maybe.

…Definitely.

Katniss liked to overreact like that and Hawks could not blame her.

He felt someone touch his neck and instinctively smacked their hand away. Miruko pulled it back and scowled at him. Hawks did not need to read her mind to know she was torn between fretting and yelling at him for worrying her.

He forced a winning smile. "If I said this was a test, would you believe me?"

"No." Todoroki said flatly.

“Figures.” Hawks sighed. “I think I passed out.”

“Really? And here I thought ‘the floor was comfy’.” Miruko growled.

Tokoyami looked at her sharply. “This has happened before?”

Hawks covered his face and groaned. “No.”

“Yes.” Miruko snapped. “After you met with Endeavor.”

Todoroki flinched. “*Endeavor* knocked you out?”

“*No*.” Hawks emphasized.

Miruko opened her mouth but he shot her a warning glare. She got the message that his burns were *not* to be mentioned under any circumstances and settled for glaring back. Hawks tried

to sit up but Iida stopped him from rising.

“You should remain laying down. Did you hit your head?”

Hawks head hurt— like always— but that was because of the voices, who clamored in the back of his mind as they tried to figure out how they fell unconscious. It took a minute but he remembered what happened now: He had given Yellow control last night.

He’d like to say that Yellow had clumsily tripped and smacked his head on something, but unfortunately the reason for their blackout was much more concerning.

Green was the second to recall what had happened. *"Yellow's Quirk knocked us out."*

“*I didn’t know it would do that!”*

“*I didn’t say you should have.”*

“*You **thought** it!”*

“*Well, kinda.*” Green admitted. *“We should’ve been more careful. Your Quirk **does** cause… mental processing problems.”*

“*You mean it turns Yellow into an idiot.”* Orange interjected.

“*Hey—! …Eh. It’s true.”* Yellow confirmed casually.

“*Back to my point.”* Green said. *“I assumed that affect would be the same here but apparently not.”*

Hawks withheld a grimace. *Sorry, Yellow. I think you’ll have to stay put for now.*

“Hawks!”

Hawks focused to see his audience was still there. He wished he had that one UA kid’s Quirk so he could sink into the floor and hopefully never come out again.

And I am now zero for two in the ‘prove to my interns I’m competent’ category. Yay.

“*They won’t look down on your for this.”* White said quietly.

“Hawks?”

He twitched and realized Miruko was reaching for him.

Hawks warded her off with a hand. “I’m fine.”

“You were not responding.” Iida said, almost timid. “We called your name but you… didn’t answer.”

‘*You stared into space like you weren’t seeing us.*’ he did not say. Hawks could read between the lines.

He cleared his throat and tried to sit up again, only to be pushed back down. He settled for glaring at the ceiling.

“That happens sometimes.” He told the ceiling tersely.

Todoroki did not get the hint to drop it. “You *do not respond* sometimes?”

“Yes.” Hawks’s angry embarrassment faded away, leaving only discomfort. “It’s being handled.”

Miruko made a strangled disbelieving sound.

Hawks deigned to ignore her. "I'm fine now."

A look passed between them and Hawks had a bad feeling he was going to have his very own collection of mother hens in the near future. Or would it be ‘mother rabbit and her mother hen interns’? Rabbit and the intern hens? That sounded like a name for a really weird rock band. And—

Uh oh.

He did *not* like the look on Miruko’s face.

Not one bit.

“Since we’re here—” she said in a voice as sweet as honey. “—how about we teach the kiddies how to look for possible head injuries?”

Hawks miserably stayed on the floor as Miruko guided the interns through the process of checking for a concussion and other fall-related injuries despite Todoroki’s mumbles that he knew all this already. In fact, they went through it multiple times, because ‘she wanted to be sure they knew how to do it right’. More like she was humiliating him out of worry-fueled spite.

His opportunity to enact vengeance upon her came swiftly when Iida asked him to share a story about Miruko to ‘check his ability to recall things and focus’. Hawks looked Miruko right in the eye and smiled sweetly.

“Did I ever tell you three about the time Miruko kicked a truck at my face?”

Miruko’s eye twitched noticably.

In his attempt to stifle a laugh, Tokoyami made a sound one would expect to come from a choking elephant. He proceeded to cough suspiciously.

“No. But that sounds like an interesting tale.” Iida said with an endearing mix of earnestness and seriousness.

As Hawks cheerfully launched into the tale and added in a nice little lesson about working with groups and being aware of teammates’ locations, he gleefully pretended to ignore

Miruko's death glare.

After all, in his humble opinion, she brought this upon herself.

XXXXXXX

Miruko cornered Hawks in his office that night. "You. Home. Now."

Hawks gave her a winning smile. "Katniss said that, too."

She was not amused. "I will *drag* you out of this office."

"Oh no. Don't kidnap me. I'm so scared." Hawks quipped. He looked down at his desk. It being clear of papers was a distant dream now. "I also have all this stuff to do—"

Three things happened in quick succession.

Miruko picked him up and slung him over her shoulder.

Hawks's muscles locked without his permission and he twisted out of her hold, landing on the ground.

He then proceeded to Judo flip his best friend.

Like a totally-fine person definitely and logically would in that situation.

Miruko was well-trained enough that the move did little more than slightly wind her, and she appeared to remain on the ground more out of surprise than actually being hurt. Hawks faltered as he realized what he had done— *Had* he been in control? Pink was apologizing so apparently not *R̸̢̛̛̛

Pink's first response was a horrified whine. *"I'm sorry. I panicked. I'm kind of short so enemies would always try to pick me up and carry me off—"*

Hey, you don't have to apologize, Hawks soothed her. He caught flickers of her thoughts and frowned. *Your reaction was not stupid. It's perfectly understandable.*

"*I hear a hypocrite!"* Orange said loudly.

Hawks made the executive decision to ignore him. He blinked and he and Miruko were on the sidewalk outside his building. Had he said goodbye to the receptionist? Probably not.

"*Maybe we should try to have someone 'keep watch' while you're talking to us."* Purple mentioned cautiously.

A brief storm of indecipherable emotions exploded from Red before she retreated.

"*Or maybe we should have someone take the driver's seat while you're out."* Orange muttered, but there was something *off* about his tone.

Hawks's skin crawled. *I'd rather you not. Partly because 'hell no', partly because if we ran into Mockingjay she'd know something's up as soon as you spoke.*

"*How?"* Green asked curiously.

Secret, Hawks thought with sugary sweetness.

Green muttered some type of begrudging acknowledgment but Pink was ecstatic. It took her explaining for Hawks to realize why.

"*We couldn't see your secret!"* she said excitedly. *"That means our walls are working. We're doing it. We're gaining control of our minds."*

Hawks knew they were nowhere close to that but he appreciated her optimism.

He and Miruko picked up food from some late-night stand and her lack of teasing as he got chicken told him that yes, she was still worried about his issues from today. What could he say? He was having an off day. Understatement of the year, but he had to live with it.

They settled around the counter in Miruko's apartment for a late dinner. Hawks absently slid his glass of water back and forth, watching the ice cubes inside it clink against the sides. He noticed Miruko was watching him and took an exaggerated bite of his meal. She huffed and dug into her own with gusto. If only the public knew that their beloved Rabbit Hero made garbage disposal noises when she ate.

"So did you enjoy your day?" Hawks asked, knowing full well that she did.

"Hell yeah." Miruko grinned widely. "Beating up your interns was fun."

Hawks rolled his eyes. "Don't you mean *training* them?"

Miruko looked him directly in the eye. “Nope.”

“You’re a menace.” Hawks said solemnly.

Miruko threw a napkin at him. “Says the guy who Judo flipped me.”

Hawks covered a wince with a smirk. “Says the girl who kicked a truck at my face.”

“You’re *still* on about that?” Miruko groaned.

“Of course. I have a whole year of mentioning to make up for. I will never let you forget your betrayal. The whole *world* must know of your misdeeds.” He avoided her shove and slouched in his seat. “Are you going to come back again?”

“Sure. The kiddies are interesting. Tokoyami’s surprisingly scrappy. Iida has a bit of a rules-complex but he improved fast. As for Todoroki…” Miruko propped her chin on her hand. “Did you know he has siblings?”

Hawks wracked his brain but gave up when the voices began jabbering and retreating like their tails were on fire. “I…” His memories scrambled before the correct one clicked. “Wait, yes I do. He has a sister. And a brother, I think?”

Miruko’s lips thinned. “Something isn’t right with that family. I did a little research and the mom is in a psych ward.”

“*Holy shit that was fast.”* Orange muttered.

“*Hush, Orange.”* Silver hissed.

“*Why should I?”* Orange challenged.

“*Because now you have no excuse to ‘accidentally’ share others’* ***private*** *information.”* Silver said sternly.

Green hummed, but there was a nervous undercurrent to it. *“Well, he kind of does since our methods aren’t one hundred percent perfect—”*

“*You’re babying him for no damn reason. Gold is going to find out anyway.”* Orange interrupted. Was that last bit a prediction or a threat?

Silver cleared his throat uncomfortably.*“Perhaps, perhaps not. You know things like this are usually kept private in our culture. I doubt even the Commission knows the whole truth.”*

“Hawks?” He blinked at Miruko, who smiled bitterly. “Ten minutes.”

Hawks bit back an apology. “Hmm.” *One problem at a time.* "I'm already looking into Endeavor." *Or I will once this week is over. But I won’t have to if you tell me things like you promised.*

“*This isn’t my thing to tell.”* Green said carefully.

Let me guess. It's White's. So how is my internship comparing to wherever you went last time?

White—Shoto Todoroki— recoiled. *"How—?"*

*Have I ever mentioned how **not** -subtle you all are? I swear I have. Maybe once. Or twice. Or a billion times. Having younger Todoroki around made it pretty obvious even with you being all quiet and secretive. Your habits betray you. That and the fact that jokes, idioms , and sarcasm fly right over your head.*

"*How would words fly…?"* White paused. *"Oh. I see."*

"*I beat you too!"* Orange crowed. *"Suck it, Half and Half!"*

Miruko was staring at Hawks. *Scrutinizing* him with those knowing red eyes of hers. He forced himself to not snap at her to stop.

"Are you sure you want to see what happens behind the scenes?" she asked. "I know you idolize Endeavor."

Hawks's fingers clenched around the chicken bone. "I'll be fine."

After dinner he went to bed but knew he would not sleep.

His mind was buzzing with too many thoughts that weren't his own. Again. The voices tried to keep their argument about whether to tell him about 'Endeavor' and 'Touya' and '[illegible] to themselves but their walls were cracking again. Who knew mentioning Endeavor could cause such a ruckus?

"We shouldn't do anything. Keeping the public on the Heroes' side is more important." White sounded as if he barely had confidence in his own words.

Orange scoffed. *"Give it up. You don't honestly believe that bullshit."*

I can hear you, Hawks thought and was pleased that said thought accurately portrayed his exasperation.

"*I know."* Orange said flatly, making a point. *"Look, I'm not into political publicity shit but Endeavor **can't** become Number One. There are too many skeletons in his closet and when people find out—"*

"***Orange**."* White said, voice low in warning.

"*Miruko's already suspicious.*" Orange snapped. *"We should **use** this! We can't sit by and do nothing. Otherwise Hero Society could collapse all over again. You **know** Endeavor's actions is one of the reasons it fell last time."*

That was news to Hawks and he shifted uncomfortably on the couch. Orange recalled he was listening in— How the heck could he have forgotten?— and scowled.

"The fact is All Might won't last forever. We all know it, but we're wasting time instead of trying to prevent what we know will happen. No one can become him, but we can at least find a more acceptable replacement than the current Number Two. People's trust in Heroes ***will*** *crumble if Endeavor becomes the top Hero again."*

Hawks decided to butt in. *You already told me about the upcoming Hero that* ***definitely*** *is not Izuku Midoriya aka 'Totally Not Green's Past Self', capital letters included—*

"*Will you let that go?"* Green moaned pitiably.

Hawks ignored his plea. *—but he's not ready to be a Symbol. So with Endeavor being… less than perfect, who are you expecting to hold up Society when All Might retires?*

There was an uncomfortable pause.

"...You." Green said quietly.

Hawks twitched and stifled a laugh. *That's hilarious. Really. Good joke.*

"I'm not joking."

Green's resignation was clear, as were the thoughts and feelings he did not share.

Hawks saw them anyway and tried not to feel hurt. *So I'm your reluctant pick because you feel you have no other options. Noted.*

Green winced. *"That's not what I meant."*

Hawks caught flickers of his other thoughts, mainly that he didn't want Hawks to get the Number One position because he knew *Hawks* didn't want it. However, the thought that Hawks was their best and only chance was also undeniable.

I know that you didn't mean it consciously, Hawks admitted. *But the fact is you're not happy to see Endeavor as Number Two and want someone else in that spot before All Might is gone. And you think I'm your only shot.* His lips twisted into a scowl. *Honestly I'd rather say no, drag my feet, and let you see me as a selfish, lazy bum who doesn't give a damn. I don't want more responsibility.*

"Well you're going to have it whether you like it or not." Green said flatly.

Hawks's jaw clenched so tightly he felt the pressure in his teeth. *So I don't have a choice,* ***again****?*

Green recoiled.

Sorry. Hawks said instantly. *I just think it's a bad idea to try to make me the eventual Number One. Honestly, I'm not that great of a Hero. I'm not strong enough to carry society on my shoulders.*

"*Hawks…"* Silver spoke slowly, as if he could not believe what he had heard. *"You save hundreds of people every day. You're kind, protective, charismatic, and friendly. Your presence alone is enough to make people feel safe."*

But I'm not a powerhouse. ***That's*** *what people want in their Number One: a Hero who can beat the worst Villains into submission. I'm good in a fight and amazing at rescues but my Quirk isn't strong enough to reassure people that I can keep them safe from big threats. And I can run out of feathers. Without them I'm 'a worthless liability and should let the battle Heroes take care of things'.*

Silver seemed at a loss. *"But… you..."*

Purple interrupted him.*"Those words... You've been told them before. Who said that to you?"*

The Commission. Who else? Hawks quickly began going through different phrases in an amalgamation of languages to stop that train of thought.

"*The Commission can eat shit."* Orange said.

Whatever, Hawks thought, too tired to deal with this. *Could you just tell me, flat out, why you think Endeavor can't be Number One?*

Naturally, they didn't.

"*Let's just say Endeavor's ascension causes some problems, and not only because of his… divisive personality."* Green said evasively. *"He's the type of Hero whose position as the Number One breeds conflict and challenge instead of peace and stability. Many may end up supporting him because they need to believe in Heroes, but others would… take issue with him being Number One and want to see him out of that position. They will… go* ***very*** *far to expose him. And as Orange said, he has skeletons that will make people turn against him if they're uncovered."*

So you think I'd be the less-controversial option? Hawks thought suspiciously.

"*Definitely."* White stated with one hundred percent certainty.

Hawks's lips thinned but he admitted they might have a point. *I am still going to investigate when I have time because I smell something fishy and you're acting shady. But I am* ***not*** *going to intentionally try to usurp Endeavor's position because someone with less skeletons needs to fill All Might's impossibly huge shoes someday. Got it?*

The Voices tried not to respond but their unhappiness was obvious— as was White's conflicted feelings.

Hawks decided to take what he could get. *Besides, I doubt I could do anything that pushes me up a rank anyway.*

XXXXXXX

Day Five

"*This is a bad idea."*

"*This is a bad idea."*

"*This is a bad idea."*

"*This is a bad idea."*

"*This is a fucking stupid idea."*

"*This is a bad idea."*

"*This is a bad idea."*

"*This is a bad idea—"*

*I get it! I **hear** you. I **know** all of you think it's a bad idea,* Hawks snapped.

"*And yet you're ignoring us."* Green stressed. *"Gold, I know you want to train Tokoyami but I don't think you should train Dark Shadow."*

*Tokoyami **must** learn control eventually*, Hawks argued. *He may as well start now and not in that fight in the forest I got flashes of last night.*

"*I don't know whose memories those were..."* White murmured.

"*Orange, White, and I were all there."* Green explained.

It was a minor detail but a huge step up from how close-lipped they had been a few days ago. Hawks trusted he would learn the whole story later. *Noted. But back on topic: Tokoyami shouldn't have to lose control like that in a battle. We are going to be proactive and **prevent** things like that. That's why you came back, right?*

"*Yeah."* Green's voice grew firmer. *"That's why."*

Hawks stopped patrol early to give him some extra time to train his interns. When he explained what they were doing, Tokoyami was understandably nervous but Iida and Todoroki voiced their support.

"This is your chance to improve your control over your Quirk." Iida encouraged. "If something goes amiss and we cannot restore the power, Todoroki's flames are bright enough to stop Dark Shadow."

"I will gladly help you in this task." Todoroki said with his usual severity.

Hawks nodded and threw them pairs of night vision goggles. "Obviously it's going to be dark and you're going to have to be able to move in it. This may as well be training for you two, too."

They put on the goggles.

“Where is your pair, Hawks-sensei?” Iida questioned as he adjusted his over his glasses. Hawks made a mental note to encourage him to implement night vision into his costume’s helmet.

Hawks grinned and tapped the area next to his eye. “I have natural night vision.” He positioned his interns around the room and sent a feather to the light switch. “Ready?”

Tokoyami took a breath, centering himself. “Ready.”

The lights turned off.

With a roar, Dark Shadow instantly swelled to an enormous size. Tokoyami’s pained cry sent shivers down Hawks’s spine but he remained calm, resisting the urge to stop the session then and there. Demonic red eyes glared at them furiously, but Hawks stared right back, focusing on the boy he could see within the mass of shadows. He should be alarmed, but it was as if he had done this so many times before that he could not be afraid.

“Can you hear me, Tokoyami?” he asked calmly.

“***Y-Yesssssss***.” Tokoyami grunted, voice hoarse and strained.

“Good.” Hawks said steadily. “I know you’re scared, but try to breathe, okay? Focus on your breaths and your heartbeat. Try to calm down. This is your Quirk, and *you* are in control.”

As shadows clung to him like black sludge from hell, Tokoyami took a shuddering breath, then a steadier one, then another. For a moment, it seemed to work. Dark Shadow stopped roaring and writhing like a thousand snakes, his furious movements becoming calmer like the tide on a nice day.

But then Tokoyami shivered, eyes going round as his pupils shrank to pinpricks, and Hawks saw the exact moment he lost all control.

Unexpectedly, Dark Shadow did not immediately go for them.

He went for the lights.

The bulbs shattered as Dark Shadow struck them, the tiny flares of electricity far from enough to slow him down. With his first weakness eliminated, he shot towards Todoroki but Hawks had already yanked him out of the way, leaving Dark Shadow to slam into the floor. It cracked under his weight and he roared in fury, turning on Hawks.

Shadows rippled around him but Hawks dodged, flying high as he could as he ducked and weaved. In hindsight, it was a good thing he had not taught Tokoyami how to take to the air yet. At least Dark Shadow was mostly confined to the ground.

“*Why isn’t Shoto doing anything?”* Orange demanded.

“*He’s frozen.”* White explained tersely.

“*Son of a bas— Gold, let me have control. I’ll stop him again.”*

Hawks dodged a writhing tendril of darkness. *And I would explain my exploding feathers **how**?*

Something he'd hate to identify as *fear* exploded from Orange. *"Just **give me control!**"*

Hawks felt a jolt as Orange tried to possess him and flinched, curling up in midair as pain lanced through his body from his head to his wingtips. Living darkness grabbed him by the head, gripping his skull and swinging him. He slammed into the wall and his breath *whoosed* out of his lungs.

Before claws could crush his head or pierce his skin, Dark Shadow abruptly released him. Hawks pushed past the shock and caught himself before he could hit the floor, only for a blur of silver to dart between him and Dark Shadow.

Dark Shadow roared and lunged for Iida—

And Hawks's consciousness was shoved aside.

One of Hawks's feathers brushed Dark Shadow and he went flying upward, dragging Tokoyami along with him. Hawks's fingers twitched but he was not the one who felt it, shoved into his head but unable to control anything.

"Oh my." Pink breathed.

She stared at Hawks's hands and watched them quiver before frantically pressing her fingertips together. Nothing happened, and Dark Shadow hit the ceiling. Before any of them could panic, fire flared to life and Dark Shadow shrank.

In a snap Hawks was back in control. He caught Tokoyami with his feathers before he could fall more than half a foot and carefully guided him to the ground. Tokoyami slumped on his hands and knees, breathing heavily. Todoroki watched him with a torn expression.

"I froze." he admitted stiffly.

"And *un*froze." Hawks countered. "You pulled through when we needed you. Well done."

The vaguely befuddled look on Todoroki's face was odd to see. What, did he expect to be angrily reprimanded or something? He did what he was supposed to, even if it was a little slower than asked. Hawks pushed those thoughts aside and hurried to Tokoyami, who was still on his hands and knees. Teary red eyes looked at him.

"I'm sorry— Hawks-sensei." he said shakily, breath hitching. "I— I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Hey, we're all okay." Hawks soothed him. "You're the one who got hurt most. Let's go to the infirmary and have the nurse check you over."

He left Iida and Todoroki with Mockingjay and helped his remaining intern along, keeping a keen eye on him in case he looked ready to fall over. Tokoyami kept his eyes on his shuffling feet as he shivered, and Dark Shadow hid under his cloak, only peeking out to stare guiltily at

Hawks. He heard Purple and Silver yelling at Orange in the back of his mind but ignored them. He had to focus on the outside world.

The nurse had been in the middle of sorting new supplies when they arrived. She fussed over them both, much longer than Hawks liked when it came to himself. All of his subtle and not-so-subtle urging that she focus on Tokoyami was ignored. They were both fine, with only a couple bruises each. When she finally declared they were free to go, Tokoyami rushed out, clearly eager to leave.

Before Hawks could leave as well, Red spoke up.

"*Gold, could you put a roll of medical tape in your pocket?"*

Hawks acknowledged her request and snagged one as he walked out.

The rest of the day was thankfully uneventful. Before his interns left, Hawks pulled Tokoyami aside.

"Promise me you won't try to train alone." he said seriously. "I want you to improve yourself, not get hurt trying to do so."

The way Tokoyami's eyes widened with surprise before he looked away told Hawks his suspicion had been right on the nose. Hawks poked him in the shoulder and kept his expression stern.

"I know all about wanting to rush through things, but you have support I never did. Your teachers will help you, and I'm always a call away. You don't have to do this by yourself out of some desire to keep others safe. Your Quirk is dangerous, yes, but I *know* you'll be able to control it someday."

It was heartbreaking how shaken Tokoyami looked by his words, as if he had never heard something like them before.

The intern bowed deeply. "I promise I will not forget. Thank you, Hawks-sensei."

Hawks waved goodbye as he walked off, returned to his office, and locked the door. He leaned against it with a sigh.

That could have gone better.

"*It also could have gone worse."* Yellow mentioned.

"*He's right. Last time Dark Shadow went on a rampage and hurt our classmate."* Green revealed. *"Luckily he could grow back his hand..."*

Orange's presence shivered but he said nothing.

Definitely an improvement then, Hawks thought. *It's too bad we don't have more time to work with him.*

"*Too bad."* Green echoed.

They stood in somber silence for a moment before Hawks shook himself. He pulled the medical tape from his pocket. *So Red, why did you want this?*

"*To try something."* she said vaguely. *"May I take control?"*

Hawks swallowed uneasily but let her. He watched Red turn the medical tape over in her hands. Her thoughts echoed through his mind.

"*Give me a moment..."*

Red concentrated.

Hawks blinked and suddenly he was holding two rolls of medical tape. Red instantly gave him his body back again and he denied that he breathed a sigh of relief.

"*I made it from some of your feathers."* she explained.

Hawks turned them between his fingers, amazed. *Did you copy it?*

"*No. I merely recalled its composition. I admit, seeing and feeling the tape helped."* she said as if such a thing were simple.

"*It appears our Quirks are mostly focused in your wings."* Green summarized thoughtfully. *"Orange's makes the feathers explode. Red's uses them to create. Pink's has them touch things to make them float. And so on."*

"*Mine knocks us out."* Yellow added miserably.

Hawks got the impression that Pink had hugged him.

He continued Green's topic of conversation. *Makes sense. Fierce Wings **is** my Quirk. I mean, I have some additional mutations but a majority of my Quirk is focused there.*

"*Ooooo."* Yellow cringed in sympathy. *"That's bad news for you, Green."*

"*Huh?"* Green questioned before realization struck. *"Oh. I learned how to use my legs to attack so I can learn to use wings and feathers too until we can figure out Full Cowl."*

"*I'm not sure you should try."* Purple mumbled. *"Your Quirk could be a danger to everyone's health."*

Green winced.

Hawks got the feeling Purple wasn't exaggerating. *Explanation?*

"*When I used to use my Quirk— One For All— I broke my bones."* Green mumbled.

Yikes.

"*I got better!"*

"*Broken bones aren't trivial injuries, Green."* Silver reminded him. His worry jabbed at Hawks. *"What if the damage focuses in Hawks's wings like our Quirks do?"*

Hawks felt the blood drain from his face. *I'd be out of commission until the bones healed. Quirks like Recovery Girl's are rare, and a lot of medical professionals with healing Quirks tend to focus on human anatomy when learning to use them. My wings change size if I use my feathers or let them grow out but I still rely on them for balance and the like. Not to mention the pain I'd be in just from my feathers regenerating… Imagine hanging weights from broken arms and adding more weight every day you don't remove some.*

"*Green's Quirk is definitely out."* Pink said shakily.

"*Join the club."* Yellow muttered.

"*We can't risk it."* Red added. *"We don't have time to heal."*

Green's frustrated disappointment was palpable.

XXXXXXX

"*Alright. All of you, fuck off."* Orange said as soon as they were alone later that day.

"*Ooo, Orange wants to have an emotional conversation!"* Yellow cooed.

"*You'll have an 'emotional conversation' with my fist if you don't move your ass."*

"*But dearest Orange, do I even have an ass to move— Eep!"*

Hawks struggled not to smile as he felt Orange bodily kick Yellow into their 'room'. The other voices wisely followed without a complaint, and Hawks felt the door shut between them.

Orange glared at it suspiciously for a while so Hawks began sorting through paperwork, deciding feigned distraction would be better than scrutiny as this certain voice gathered his thoughts.

"*I'm sorry."*

Hawks blinked, sure he had misheard. *Huh?*

Orange shifted uncomfortably, presence screaming annoyance— and guilt. *"I said I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry for trying to take control like that earlier. It was a shitty, scummy, asinine thing to do."*

Hawks felt the feathers on his wings relax. He had not even realized how tense they'd been until they weren't. *Apology accepted.*

"*Argh, you're so annoying!"* Orange exploded. *"How can you just forgive me like that, huh? I tried to force you out of control of your own damn body. Have some self-respect! Or at least self-preservation,* ***idiot****."*

Hawks struggled not to smile. *Is that you admitting you care about me?*

"*Screw you!"*

That wasn't a no.

"***Arrrgggghhh, I hate you!****"*

Hawks stifled a laugh but stopped teasing him. *I won't pretend I'm not freaked out by what you did, but the past is the past, and you apologized without being forced to.*

"*Stupid shitty Deku rubbed off on me."* Orange muttered darkly.

Or your better nature rubbed off on yourself, Hawks said. *You're nicer than you pretend to be.*

Rather than make him splutter in rage like Hawks expected, Orange flinched like he'd been struck. *"Don't say that. You don't know me at all."*

I know you yell a lot, swear a lot, fight a lot, and care a lot about your friends, Hawks said firmly. *I also have the feeling that last one wasn't always the case.*

"*What gave it away?"* Orange mocked.

Your reaction to Endeavor. And your brooding since then. He hesitated, glancing down at the paper in his hands, and set it down before moving on to the next one. *You're not like him.*

"*You're right."* Orange said, and there was something unexpectedly *wild* about his presence, like he'd been waiting so long for someone to notice that he lost his mind. It put Hawks on edge. *"I'm not like Endeavor. I'm* ***worse****."* Orange's sorrow tore the breath from Hawks's lungs. *"I killed All Might."*

"*No you didn't."* Green said, as if he'd been summoned by the words. *"It's not your fault."*

With how quickly he reacted, Hawks had the feeling they'd had this conversation before.

"*But it was* ***my fault*** *that All Might had to retire. It was his retirement that led to—"*

"*Everything falling apart."* Green murmured.

Red-hot anger burned Hawks's veins and he struggled for breath.

"*You're going to hide things even now? We're going to tell him what happens anyway so why hide I'm a* ***murderer****?"*

"*You're not a murderer, Orange."* Green stated. *"I didn't realize Dark Shadow's rampage would remind you of that night in the forest..."*

His compassion was like a balm to Hawks.

To Orange, it was an insult.

"*FUCK OFF, DEKU!"* he screamed and stormed deep into Hawks's head.

Green watched him go and sighed. *"Sorry about that, Gold. Orange isn't so great with emotions. He usually fights to let them out because that's how he does things, but in here he can't do that."*

It's okay. If anything, it's my fault for not considering how you might react to a rampaging Dark Shadow.

The implication that Hawks would be more conscious of avoiding such triggers when he was aware of their pasts lingered in the air but went unsaid. Green had already promised to tell him some things after they rescued Eri.

Hawks could afford to wait a few days for some answers.

XXXXXXX

Day Six

It was the night before the last day of internships. Six days since they had begun to try to control themselves enough for the voices' mission. Hawks got little sleep the past week— other than the nightmares that would not be mentioned— but the results were worth it. Perhaps nine brains were better than one, or perhaps certain instincts did not leave when the eight transferred into Hawks's mind. Regardless, they had made quick— if barebone— progress.

They discovered only Hawks could use all of their Quirks. Theoretically, anyway, since he had used Orange's and may have used White's to get rid of his feathers in the woods. Green timidly theorized Orange's frustration may have something to do with its manifestation and Orange insulted him as was his usual, pretending that his vulnerability had never been shared.

Regardless, the voices could not use each other's Quirks. Pink could not use Green's or vice versa. Through their tests, they discovered the voices could only be in control for short periods of time. Five hours was their limit.

It would have to be enough.

Hawks told Miruko and Mockingjay he was going to sleep in his office again. They protested, but relented when he showed them the lovely stack of papers he still had to go through.

His hands were shaking as he locked the office door. The voices had not told him their mission would be tonight, but he knew it was. He swallowed the near-hysterical desire to tell

them to do it without warning him, just to get it over with. Getting shoved out of the driver's seat did not hurt, exactly, but it was terrifying. Purple promised he would get Hawks to drift if he could not do it on his own. It would be like being put under anesthesia for surgery. But instead of losing his liver or kidney or the like, he'd be giving up his body for a few hours.

Hawks already had so little control of his life. This was just icing on the cake.

But he had to be selfless. The Number Three Hero Hawks could not go on an unsanctioned mission to rescue a girl no one knew existed.

A *vigilante* could, not that Hawks would ever admit that to anyone.

Yellow and Green's Quirks were too dangerous for them to take control.

Pink's Quirk was still *out* of control. She could make things float but could not figure how to make them stop floating since her previous canceler method did nothing.

They had not figured out how to use Purple's outside their body yet. It was not like they could walk up to someone and try to brainwash them. If it failed or their target noticed, it did not need to be stated that things would fail to end well.

The same Quirk problems were also the case for Silver, who could not figure out if Hawks even *had* his Quirk or not. No engines appeared in his wings or legs no matter how hard he or Silver focused and Hawks was no sure he wanted them to.

White refused to try his Quirks, fearing he may burn all of Hawks's feathers or leave him with horrible frostbite. Unless their presences changed Hawks's constitution, he would not be able to handle extreme heat and cold like White could.

That left Red and Orange.

Red's encyclopedic knowledge of different objects' makeup could be invaluable if their target was injured like she likely might be. As for Orange, his Quirk was easy enough to control, if only because he was extremely stubborn. Just send out a feather and let it go boom to his heart's content.

Hawks didn't like to admit that he was a bit wary of letting Orange possess him after the incident yesterday, but he *had* apologized and it would be detrimental to their mission if he complained. Red mentioned she could make the feathers into some type of knife— thus distancing their Quirks from Hawks even further— and Hawks agreed. He had more than enough feathers at the moment that no one would notice some missing tomorrow.

That did not stop him from shaking as he let his feathers drop from his back, knowing he could telekinetically pick them up in the morning. Only the smallest and his wing bones remained, which could easily be hidden under his clothes. He shivered, feeling cold and exposed, but knew it was just his mind playing tricks on him.

"*You don't have to do this."* Green told him.

Yes, I do, Hawks replied. *I'm not going to leave a little girl to suffer just because I'm nervous. What kind of Hero would I be if I did that?* He clenched his shaking fists and swallowed dryly. *Just promise me you will **never** take over without my permission.*

He felt a flicker of guilt from Red and Orange before eight voices overlapped into a unified legion. ***"We promise."***

Hawks believed them.

He inhaled, exhaled, and let himself drift…

And Momo Yaoyorozu opened Hawks' eyes and flexed his hands.

"We're ready."

They *weren't* ready. Not really. But a little girl needed a Hero.

Chapter End Notes

More fan art, courtesy of CanIHaveAHug! (Thank you! I swear you're trying to make me explode into a happy puddle of goo… *tackle hugs (again)*) See it here.

Ennea

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The eight time travelers could not simply rush out the door, no matter how eager they were to get to Eri. There was some preparation to be done before they could leave. Hawks had many feathers, but it would not do to waste them.

Yaoyorozu and Gre— Midoriya had a theory that she may be able to regenerate his feathers using his lipids, but they had not tested that yet and Hawks did not have the extra weight they needed. They had to make it seem like Hawks had not used his feathers this night, so he had to still have a good amount of them in the morning. It put limits on what the time travelers could do but Yaoyorozu had worked with less before. They all had.

Yaoyorozu immediately got to work. She created guns and a staff for herself and throwing knives for Oran— Bakugo. They were not expecting a fight, but they had to be prepared for one. It was disconcerting to be able to bundle feathers together to create instead of pulling objects from her body. She tried very hard not to think about her current body, because it was all so wrong and—

Calm down. Everything is fine. Focus on the mission.

That done, she quickly made the remaining bits of a rough costume, putting together the last pieces of what she had been working on all week. Hawks had no idea she and the others had been doing things while he drifted, and they all felt dirty for using him while he was unconscious, but the less he knew, the better. They truly must be able to hide things from him since he did not question how she was able to perfectly use her Quirk to create medical tape the day before on the 'first' try.

It was horrible to think about and made them all feel awful but it was also unavoidable. Things were too dangerous for Hawks to know their plans until after they were complete. It would be too easy to slip up in some way and have the Commission or other Heroes carting them off to jail or a psych ward. Thus, they had even more secrets to add to their ever-growing list.

It did not stop them from feeling guilty, knowing they had taken advantage of Hawks's 'vacant' body without his permission and while he was completely unaware of what was happening. It did not help when Yellow, er *Kaminari*— Goodness, she must be getting used to their code names— mentioned a distant but not completely unconnected comparison that left them all feeling like the worst of villains.

Regardless, it was too late to back out or undo their choice to use his drifting to their advantage. Yaoyorozu could only hope Hawks would forgive them when he found out.

The costume Yaoyorozu created was a simple black body armor with a hood and mask that completely covered the face. It was a loose fit, expertly hiding their figure so it would be

impossible to tell if they were male or female. Midoriya had been the one to get the measurements they needed, feeling guilty and disgusted with himself all the while. The boots had a special bottom to give them a couple more inches of height without making it seem like it did.

With Pur— Shinso's help, a vocal synthesizer added another layer to the disguise. It combined and warped their voices while adding many more into the mix. Yaoyorozu knew if she wanted to, she could separate them and hear the voices of fallen Heroes; of all those they had lost in the future which included the voices of her— fallen— adult classmates.

She did not want to.

So she did not try to.

The next— and from a certain point of view, most important— piece was one Mei Hatsume from the future created that Yaoyorozu knew how to replicate from memory. It was a small device that would knock out any security cameras in their vicinity, allowing them to move around undetected and out of video footage unless they wanted to be seen.

Finally there was the mask. Pink— *Uraraka*— and Yellow— no, *Kaminari* complimented the personal touches, while Silver— Damn it. He was *Iida*.— worried it was a bit much. White — *Todoroki*, not White. Though perhaps it was a good thing she was becoming used to calling them their code names. Deniability was their ally. *Todoroki* murmured that unless they ran into a telepath who took some leaps in logic, the little flairs would ring few alarms.

Gree— Midoriya's voice echoed in her mind. Unlike with Hawks, their communication was less like involuntary thought-sharing and more like more voluntary telepathy. *"Remember, our mission is to rescue Eri. That's it. We're **not** blowing up the base, arresting the Eight Expendables, or bringing the whole Yakuza down. We're there for Eri. With her out of Overhaul's clutches, the Quirk Erasing serum production will stop and we can take out Shie Hassaikai later. We aren't there for a fight—"*

"*For fuck's sake! I **know**, Green."* Bakugo interrupted and Yaoyorozu was unable to tell if he realized he had not called him 'Deku' or even 'Izuku'. *"I don't need that lecture. I've had more stealth missions under my belt than you, Suckerpunch. I'm not a stupid kid looking for villains to beat up anymore. And I'm not going to pick a fight that might cost us Eri."*

Midoriya murmured an apology.

Yaoyorozu put the costume on— careful not to look at Hawks's body— and handed control over to Bakugo. There was no sign of his anguish from yesterday, though Yaoyorozu expected no less. They had a mission to complete.

Bakugo immediately flicked two feathers turned knives into his hands and leaped out the window. Just like he had practiced as Hawks slept, explosions burst from the knives, propelling them forward much like Bakugo had learned to do with his normal Quirk. It had taken a few tests— along with some unnerving close calls which would not be mentioned— but he always had been rather stubborn when it came to learning— or in this case, re-learning — such things. He kept the blast going so the 'knives' would not instantly disintegrate.

If anyone near Hawks's Hero Agency looked up that night, they would have seen a shooting star soar across the sky.

XXXXXXX

Eri curled up on her rickety bed, listening to it creak every time she breathed. She bit her lip as she pressed her bandaged arms to her chest and huddled as tightly as she could, ignoring the prickling in her eyes. Today had been a particularly bad one and she doubted tomorrow would be any better. Overhaul had taken a lot of her blood, tore her apart, put her back together, and taken more. It hurt, and Eri wanted to cry but she didn't because she knew crying would not stop them. It never did. *Nothing* she did could stop them so she endured her life in silence, knowing things would never change and showing it hurt would only make them angrier.

Deep down, Eri knew she deserved it because she was a curse and a weapon that brought only suffering, but sometimes she wished she didn't. Those types of thoughts were selfish of her, because although she was cursed, Overhaul still had it in his heart to find a use for her. He could have killed her permanently, as he implied curses deserved, but instead he let her live. He even fed her, and gave her toys sometimes. She should be grateful, like he said.

She did not feel grateful.

She just *hurt*.

A low click from the door sent her jolting upright in her bed as she held her breath. She stared at the door, begging it not to open, and to her relief, it remained shut. No other sound followed and she slowly laid back down, heart hammering in her small chest as she pulled her blanket around her and pressed her pillow around her head.

It was still nighttime, so they would not come for her yet. She had to believe nights were safe. She counted them as the one time she would always be away from the labs. She *had* to have at least this—

The door opened.

Eri sat up again, eyes wide in fright as a dark figure appeared in the doorway, barely visible in the lack of light. It was not her caretaker, or Overhaul, or anyone she knew. They were much taller than her, and she could not tell whether they were a boy or girl. Their dark clothes were too loose, their hands, feet, and hair covered, leaving their figure and coloring a mystery.

But what frightened Eri most was their face, or lack of one.

Their face was hidden by an ethereal mask that gave them an almost spirit-like appearance. The upside-down pentagon-like black mask was blank and smooth, lacking features like lips and a nose as it covered everything from their mouth to their eyes in darkness.

The only detail on the mask were the nine colored dots patterned into a diamond on its forehead. Red, orange, yellow, green, purple, pink, silver, and white all surrounded a single

golden dot in the middle, surrounding it like guards defending something precious. Or a cage keeping a prisoner inside. In the darkness, the dots were the only visible color on the figure, leaving them almost glowing in the backdrop of black.

"**Hello, Eri. Do not be afraid. We are here to help you.**"

Their voice was scary. They spoke with more voices than one, boy and girl and high-pitched and deep and indeterminable voices, all overlapping into a powerful crescendo that made it seem like a thousand people were speaking at once.

Their voice was soothing. Even with that overwhelming crescendo, they spoke gently, kindly, and Eri was confused why it was directed at her. She was a curse and a weapon and evil by nature, and she caused problems for everyone. This person must have made a mistake. They could not be here to help Eri.

The stranger stepped slowly into her room, a shadow shifting in the darkness. They moved so silently Eri wondered if they were a ghost. She dare not move, watching them with round eyes as they approached, too terrified to speak. They crouched next to her bed and she got a clear sense of *presence*, confirming they were indeed a physical person.

The blank mask stared at her for a while, tilting slightly as if they were looking her over.

"**You do not need immediate medical attention.**" they murmured, making her jump. "**Let me…**" There was a pause before they spoke again. "**I need to carry you, br— kid. Is that okay or what?**"

Their voice seemed harsher and less formal now. Not in an *angry* way, but simply a gruff way. At least, she hoped so. Eri wanted to protest, but they had crossed their arms in a clear display of impatience and she did not dare to. Saying 'no' would not stop them from doing what they wanted. So she stayed quiet, as she always did, and accepted her life was not hers to control.

Despite their harsh tone, the hands that picked her up were *gentle*.

Eri stayed stock still in their grasp, bewildered by the carefulness the stranger lifted her with, as if she was not something to be hurt. They truly must be here for someone else, because they should never handle Eri with such kindness. She wanted to tell them they made a mistake but if she argued, they would get angry and that kindness would go away.

Eri did not want that kindness to go away, even if it was a mistake.

She was so selfish.

The stranger settled her onto their hip. One of the bandages on her wrists slipped, revealing scars. They tensed, and for a moment Eri felt bloodlust just like Overhaul's, but not. It was… not murderous like his, but still *angry*. It vanished before she could feel afraid. They carefully — *gently*— reapplied the bandages.

"**We cannot fight them now.**" they breathed and their distorted voice seemed even rougher. "**Too risky. We must leave but we *will* return to finish this. We are here to *save*.**" They looked down at her. "**Hold on.**"

The world blurred.

Eri clung to the stranger and buried her head in their chest. The wind whipped at her hair and although she could not bear to look, she knew they were moving very fast. The stranger slowed and she forced her eyes open to see two guards on the floor. Had the stranger *killed* them? Was they like Overhaul? The answer proved to be 'no' as she had just long enough to see they were breathing before the stranger had taken her outside.

"**You may want to hide your face, kid. We are going to be flying pretty fast.**" they said.

Eri nodded and clutched at their costume as they kept their left arm around her. She heard a low boom and a bit of heat and flinched away from it but she did not burn. They moved for a long time and Eri shivered in the cold. The stranger's arm tightened around her, not painful, but firm. Was this what a 'hug' was? For a moment, Eri let herself be selfish and hope that the stranger would never let go.

Then the air stopped rushing around them and they landed. The stranger set her down and Eri opened her eyes to a city. She stared at the huge buildings around her in wonder, fascinated by the colors and lights twinkling in the night like stars. One particular building caught her eye, the one they stood in front of. She did not know all her words, but she recognized the first one.

'*Hawks.'* Like the bird that flew freely in the sky.

The stranger knelt beside her, mask at her level. "**Go into this office. There is a woman at the desk. Tell her you need help.**"

The stranger rose and Eri realized they were going to leave. Desperation clogged her throat and she lurched for them, clinging to their leg.

"Please don't leave me."

She felt them stiffen but they did not shove her away. How could they be so kind to her even after she clearly upset them? The mask slowly faced them, blank and emotionless, and she worried she might have angered them again. Then they crouched down, and placed a gentle hand on her head.

"**We can't stay, Eri.**" they said in a voice that was too soft to be the harsher one and too informal to be the polite one. "**It is too dangerous. However**..." They looked at the building. **"There is a man with wings in there. He is a good and strong one who can protect you. He will listen to you. He will help you. He will *believe* you, as he believed us. *Trust him*.**"

Eri's lip quivered but she did not allow herself to cry. Nor did she allow herself to protest more. She had already pushed her luck by asking them to stay. The stranger rose and patted

her head one last time and she realized she had no idea who they were. They had been so impossibly kind to her. She could not let them leave without knowing.

"What's your name?" Eri blurted.

They paused, and although they did not seem angry, they did not look at her. "…**We are Ennea.**"

Eri blinked and they were gone. She stood in the empty street for a moment and clutched her hands together, pressing them to her chest. Slowly, she took a step towards the building Ennea had indicated. Then another, and another, and another, until she reached the glass door.

She hesitated.

What if Ennea was wrong? What if they were actually working for Overhaul and this was a new punishment? What if they sent her back?

Eri trembled and gripped her ragged dress in her fists. She did not want to go back, but if she didn't do that wouldn't people be hurt because of her? Overhaul always said she hurt people and if she did not, he would. He killed the yakuza who had almost lost her a few weeks ago. Eri had hidden in one of the lab's closets and they'd miraculously missed her for a few hours, long enough to think she had escaped outside. When they had found her, Overhaul had been furious at the wasted time and killed them on the spot.

But what if Ennea was right, and these people would try to help her? What if they were not working for Overhaul? What if they *didn't* send her back? Eri knew the answer. Overhaul would come for them and hurt and kill them, ripping them apart like he did Eri but not putting them back together again.

Eri should go back on her own so no one else would be hurt.

She had to.

She should.

She really should.

She *couldn't*.

Eri trembled as she pushed the glass door open. The room inside was very nice and very big, filled with light and colors so much warmer than the lab.

The lady that was supposed to be at the desk was not there.

Eri looked around frantically for her but saw no one, though there was a half-empty mug on the desk. Did that mean she was nearby? Or maybe she was gone just for a second, like that caretaker had been gone for a second long enough for Eri to hide.

The lady that was supposed to be at the desk would be back soon.

Right?

Eri heard clicking steps and realized the lady was indeed coming back. All she had to do was stay in place and the lady would see her. She would see her like Ennea said and she would call the winged man and Eri would tell him that she needed help and—

Eri couldn't do it.

She scrambled to the corner instead and hid behind a potted plant.

The lady that walked by her did not look very nice. She had her dark hair in a braid, wore black like Ennea, and had a face mask clipped on her belt that was kind of like theirs, but her expression was stern and closed off. *Cold*. People always looked cold around Eri. Could it be because of her?

The lady walked up to the desk and put something on it before pausing. Eri put her hands over her mouth, trying to keep her breathing quiet. To her relief, the lady with the braid walked away.

Eri remained behind the plant, too terrified to move. She was not sure how long she sat there with her heart pounding like a caged bird in her chest, but it felt like forever.

From this part of the room, part of her vision was blocked by the plant but she could see elevator doors. A number on the top lit up and slowly moved down. She followed it with her eyes until it stopped on the bottom floor. Something dinged and she jumped, pressing herself into the corner behind the potted plant.

The elevator doors opened and an angel stepped out.

His wings were red and not white, but he *must* be an angel, like the ones in a picture book Eri vaguely remembered. Was this man the winged one that Ennea spoke of? How many winged people were there? Eri knew there were people with wings, but was he the right one? Was he the one to trust? Eri knew the only way to find out would be to show herself, but she could not make herself move. What if she was wrong and he wasn't the one Ennea spoke of?

The winged man looked her way and she flinched, hiding behind the potted plant, but she knew he had seen her. Footsteps approached, almost as quiet as Ennea's, until the sound stopped.

Eri peered around the plant and saw gold eyes. The man was kneeling behind the plant, looking at her. He did not *seem* mad she was there, in a place she was not supposed to be. Instead he looked calm. Not Overhaul's fake angry-calm. Just… calm. Serene. Peaceful.

(Safe?)

"Hey there, little Starling." he said quietly. "I'm Hawks, a Pro Hero. Are you okay?"

Eri stared at him, eyes wide. She opened her mouth. Closed it. Opened it again. She tried and tried and *tried* but could not make her voice work. The man did not reach for her or become

upset for wasting his time. His gaze flicked to her bandaged arms. He breathed out, slowly. He did not seem to become angry like Ennea, to her relief.

"This corner is a little uncomfortable." Hawks said lightly. "Do you want to go to the couch or should I bring something here?"

Eri stared at him in confusion. He was *asking her?* That was not right. Was he confused like Ennea? She huddled into the corner and shivered.

"Okay then." Hawks said. He was still not upset with her but *why?* "You look a little cold. Here you go."

He removed his blue jacket and draped it over her shoulders. It was heavy but warm, and the softest fabric she had ever felt. She gripped it despite herself and stared at this confusing, different person. He was sitting now instead of crouching, his legs neatly crossed.

A new lady— not the one with the braid— appeared in the doorway that led deeper into the building. She spotted Hawks, stepped towards him, and abruptly turned away, leaving the room again. Eri thought she caught a glimpse of black as the door swung shut. Was Ennea in there? Or was it that other lady with the braid?

The coat was warm but the floor was cold. Eri shivered but she dare not ask if they could go to the couch now. She had already said no, so it was too late, right?

"How about we go to the couch?" Hawks asked. "I promise it is much comfier than the floor. I know from personal experience." He chuckled lightly, and even his *laugh* was nice.

He must be *very* confused, like Ennea was. Eri was not supposed to be asked things or treated with kindness. She was a curse. She was a weapon. She should tell him that. But she was selfish, and liked his kindness. She did not want it to go away if he found out she was evil.

She got to her feet, pulling his warm coat with her, and stumbled over to the couch. He did not try to take her by the arm and drag her. Why didn't he *understand*? He glanced at her bare feet and may have frowned but it was gone when Eri looked at him to be sure. She sat on the couch and he sat on a chair next to it. He leaned forward and clasped his hands. Eri flinched. Overhaul sat like that too. Hawks immediately leaned back and unclasped his hands, setting them on his knees and spreading his wings over the arms of the chair.

"Can I ask you a couple questions?" Hawks asked.

Why was he asking her again? People did not ask her things. They told her what would be done, and demanded she accept it. Hawks was so strange. Maybe he really was an angel and not a man since he did not understand how the world worked. Eri had to accept his strangeness though. She did not want to anger him. He would give her back to Overhaul.

Wouldn't he?

No, he would. There was no doubt about...

"*Trust him."*

Doubt was not a foreign feeling for Eri, but it was the first time she felt it about what she knew about the world. She looked down at the couch instead of Hawks and kept quiet. It had a pretty diamond design. Not like Ennea's dot diamond. These ones were not specks like stars or the city's lights. They were filled with a single color— red— and outlined in a nice gold.

Hawks did not get angry when she kept quiet.

He did not grab her and drag her away.

He simply waited, as if he knew she needed time.

Ennea was right.

He *was* kind.

"...Okay." Eri whispered, finally answering his question.

"Good." he said, patiently, calmly, *kindly*. "Can you tell me your name?"

She ducked her head so her hair fell into her face. "…Eri."

Hawks smiled. It *looked* kind. It *was* kind. But *why*? "Nice to meet you, Eri. How did you end up here at my Hero Agency?"

"I was dropped off outside." she said quietly.

She did not mention Ennea or that they was a stranger. She did not know a lot about many things, but she knew that people tended to not like it when strangers were mentioned. Overhaul always got angry when unknown people started poking around in his business.

Hawks hummed vaguely. "Where are your parents?"

Eri turned white and huddled in the coat.

"Don't send me back, please!" she blurted. "I-I-I know I deserve to be hurt but—"

His jaw clenched, just for a second, and she clamped her mouth shut, struck mute with fear. A pained look crossed his face and her heart squeezed in her chest. Had she hurt him? Hawks took a breath and met her gaze with his own again. Impossibly, his golden eyes were *still kind*.

"I promise I won't if you don't want me to." he soothed. His gaze flicked to her arms again and his lips thinned. "I don't know what you've been told, but you do not deserve to be hurt."

Eri stared at him, her confusion boiling over. What was he saying? Did he truly not understand she was a curse? That she was a weapon, meant to destroy? How could he think he was right and she didn't deserve to be hurt?

She tried to hold them in but her body did not listen to her and her eyes filled with tears against her will. He noticed but he did not become angry, or yell at her, or scoff. Instead he

carefully put a hand on her shoulder. His touch was different, like Ennea's. So gentle. So *kind*. It didn't hurt. It overwhelmed her. It was too much. Her breath hitched and the tears in her eyes rolled down her cheeks.

"I was s-supposed to say I need help." she hiccuped.

"I'll help you." Hawks said firmly and he *meant* it. He stood and held out his hand."Let's get you some warmer clothes, okay?"

Eri hesitated.

She *shouldn't*.

She shouldn't be here.

She shouldn't be near him.

She was a curse and a weapon that hurt everyone around her and she should be grateful Overhaul found a use for her— a way to make even her curse bring about a 'better' world— even though she did not like it.

She should not accept Hawks's undeserved kindness, because he was confused like Ennea and thought she should be saved and not hurt.

Except...

"*He will listen to you. He will help you. He will believe you, as he believed us.* ***Trust him****."*

"Don't leave me?" she whispered, not meaning to make it a question.

His smile was kind and warm. "I won't."

She took his hand.

Chapter End Notes

FLOWERPOWER778 DREW ENNEA! THANK YOU! See the fanart here. And you can see more of their art here.

Believe Me (Please)

Hawks was beyond exhausted. He knew he had slept, but it felt like he had been up all night. His muscles felt stiff, and his wings were almost too heavy for his back, weighing down on his shoulders. He did not let his discomfort show as he headed to the Kettle's small fridge and peered inside.

"Are you hungry, Starling?"

Clothed in a blue dress they had for such occasions— too many people tended to drop off children at Hero Agencies, whether they were lost, found, or unwanted by their guardians, so they each had a supply of clothes— the little girl named Eri stared at him for too long, not reacting to the question. He saw her brow furrow the tiniest bit— likely at the nickname— but he had the awful feeling it was also because she was not used to being spoken to with any affection at all. It was painfully obvious the girl was unused to being asked for her opinion.

Hawks tried not to let it show how that bothered him. Or that he wanted to tear whoever hurt this kid to *shreds*. Miruko would probably cackle at him for becoming so attached already and jokingly ask if he got the adoption papers out yet— as if he could take care of a child or would let them anywhere near the Commission's radar— but he couldn't help it. He peeked in the fridge again, trying to guess what a kid might enjoy.

"Would you like some soba? Juice? An apple?"

"…Apple." Her voice was so soft he barely heard it.

Hawks shot her an easygoing grin. "Apple coming right up."

He cut two of the red fruits into pieces and placed one of the plates in front of her, another in front of himself. He started eating with no dramatics, trying to enforce the sense that no, this was not some elaborate trick, and no, she was *not* going to get into trouble for eating an apple. It must have worked because Eri nibbled at a couple slices, though she still sent him befuddled looks when she thought he could not see her. Hawks would like to delude himself into believing it was because of his wings, but knew it was because he was treating her like a human being.

Oh, did that *ever* piss him off. He did not show it though, casually eating his apple as he made sure the thin, bedraggled little girl did the same.

The door to the kitchen opened and Mockingjay walked in with a bag over her shoulder. Eri instantly froze like a kitten in a wolf's jaws. Mockingjay appeared to ignore them as she sat at the other end of the table but Hawks knew better.

"Hi, Mockingjay!" he greeted brightly.

She mumbled a tired greeting back and pulled a few things out of her bag. At first there were just reports and papers, but then a coloring book, some crayons, and what looked like water

colors joined the pile. She placed them around her, and Hawks saw her eyes slide subtly towards Eri. The little girl looked at the supplies with longing.

"I have some extra books here I'm not using." Mockingjay said. "Would you like some?"

The wording was *very* intentional to make it seem like she had not brought them just for Eri. The girl's near-hysterical bewilderment whenever she was given something broke Hawks's heart and he did not want to see that again. She had stared at the dress Hawks's receptionist offered her for *five minutes* before hiccuping that they were confused and making a mistake. Making it appear that, '*oh* would you look at that, Mockingjay just *happened* to have extras she was not using' may be an improvement over giving Eri 'something she didn't deserve'.

If Hawks heard her apologetically mumble that phrase one more time he might just say to hell with legalities and sic Mockingjay on whoever hurt this kid. She could get away with vicious takedowns that leaned towards outright brutality.

Eri hesitantly scooted closer to Mockingjay and carefully grabbed a crayon and book, as if she expected them to be ripped out of her hands. The Underground Hero did not appear to acknowledge her acquisition of the items, focusing on her own. Eri immediately retreated back to Hawks's side, sitting close to him. Did she trust him to some degree? He could only hope.

Hawks's phone beeped. It was a message from the receptionist telling him the police had arrived. "Hey, Starling."

She looked at him warily.

"I need to go for a second but I'll be right back, okay? I'm not leaving."

He made sure to *tell her* that, because there seemed to be some abandonment problems there too. Her small fingers squeezed the green crayon she held but she nodded, tears in her eyes.

Hawks gently patted her hair, keeping it together as her eyes widened in confused wonder *again* at the small show of kindness. Then he walked out.

Out of Eri's sight, Hawks took a moment to snarl and drag his hands angrily down his face. It was much harder than it looked to remain cheerful and show no signs of anger when all he wanted to do was introduce Eri's guardians to the stabbing ends of his feathers. But he could not afford to show how furious he was. Eri would think it was directed at her.

Hawks took breaths to calm himself down as he made his way to the front desk, where Detective Tsukauchi and another officer he could not place were waiting for him. The Detective's presence was a surprise. Usually he tended to be more involved in All Might's cases than other Heroes.

"Hi, Tsukauchi." Hawks greeted brightly. "You know, if you want to see me so badly we could meet up for lunch or something. We can both wear crappy disguises so it's obviously still us. The tabloids would have a field day trying to figure out how we know each other."

"They'd probably think I'm your father somehow despite us looking nothing alike." Tsukauchi acknowledged. At least he understood the necessity of Hawks's special brand of 'I need to crack a joke so please let me or I'm going to start throwing things' humor. "You look better than the last time I saw you."

Hawks glanced at his mostly-red wings— only a few dull feathers remained— and had to agree. "Yeah. It turns out a balanced diet is a lot of help."

"Indeed." That done, the detective got straight to business. "What happened?"

Hawks shoved his hands into his pockets. "Not much. I was asleep in my office. Got a call from one of my workers that there was a little girl in the lobby so I came downstairs and found her in the corner."

The memory was still fresh in his mind. Hawks had woken up feeling like he hadn't eaten in weeks. His wings had also shed most of their feathers, which lay on the floor around the couch. He'd reattached them without much thought, used to shedding them by now, only for Mockingjay to call and quietly tell him there was a scared little girl hiding in the lobby. She had apparently appeared when the receptionist went to the restroom, and yes, Hawks was going to have a *talk* with security about that. Mockingjay was surprisingly good with kids but the girl had fled when she came in. They had hoped Hawks would seem more approachable — kids loved his bright red wings— and thankfully they were right.

Hawks explained that and detailed his first meeting with Eri to Tsukauchi as they returned to the kitchen. "—and I'm not sure we should start with the questions about her parents— if they even *are* her parents and aren't kidnappers— right yet. She's *very* jumpy to say the least."

"How badly is she injured?" Tsukauchi asked.

"Not badly enough to take her to the hospital, though she should have a checkup." Hawks's lips twisted into a scowl. "You know how I said she's jumpy? She went *bone whit*e when my receptionist mentioned seeing the nurse. I didn't have the heart to force her to go so I told her we didn't have to." His hands clenched so hard he felt his fingernails bite his palms. "The way she *stared* at me… It's like she never had someone help her before."

"Well, we know *one* person has." Tsukauchi murmured.

"Yeah." Hawks's eyes narrowed. "Whoever dropped her off."

"The police are already going through the security footage around your building but we'd like to see what Eri can tell us."

Hawks nodded sharply and paused outside the kitchen door. He took a breath, smiled, and pushed it open. "I'm back!"

Hawks was not a crier, but his eyes stung a bit when Eri looked at him with blatantly shocked relief. How could someone make a kid so terrified? He ushered Tsukauchi in and sat next to Eri. She did not shrink away, though she eyed the detective nervously.

"Eri, this is my friend Detective Tsukauchi. Is it okay if he asks you a couple questions?"

She looked worried but she nodded. Tsukauchi's smile was kind, which still puzzled her if her wrinkled brow was any indication.

*And I am going to **keep** my 'not hunting monsters and beating the crap out of them right now' mentality yesssss.*

"Pleasant to meet you, Eri." Tsukauchi said. He took out a notepad. "Now, what can you tell us about your friend who dropped you off?"

Eri hesitated, expression torn.

Hawks suspected he knew why. "They're not in trouble. We just want to know who they are."

Eri looked down and let her hair fall into her face. "They said their name was Ennea."

Obviously a code name.

"Could you tell if Ennea is a boy or a girl?" Tsukauchi questioned.

Eri shook her head fiddled with her dress. "They covered their face with a mask and their voice was funny like lots of people were talking together." She looked at Tsukauchi nervously as she failed to answer. Had failure to give a satisfying answer caused her trouble in the past? Hawks tried not to think about it. "They could fly really fast. It made the air hot."

Possible rocket-based flight Quirk. Or maybe explosion based if they use the propulsion. Noted.

"Did they say anything to you before they left?" Tsukauchi asked.

"They said it was too dangerous for them to stay and… and that the winged man would help me." Eri glanced at Hawks and ducked her head. "They said you'd b-believe me like you believed them."

"I do, Starling." Hawks reassured her soothingly.

His thoughts whirled. Ennea knew him? He had helped them in the past? That left a lot of possible candidates and a boatload of questions, though it also explained why they had chosen his Agency to drop Eri off at.

Tsukauchi shifted in his seat, leaning forward. "Do—"

Eri scooted away from him. "You should stay away. I'm cursed."

Hawks fought back a frown. "'Cursed'?"

She nodded solemnly. "I hurt people."

"How?" Hawks asked gently.

She paused and stared at him like she herself wondered about that. Then her gaze dropped. "I don't know. But… Daddy—" She said the word strangely, as if she were unused to using that term. "—says I have a curse that's a bad disease."

Hawks forced himself not to frown. 'Daddy' was earning himself a punch to the face if Hawks ever saw him. And that was if Hawks calmed down enough. "I see. Eri, do you know what a Quirk is?"

She stared at him and did not reply. Was she afraid of giving the wrong answer?

An officer appeared in the doorway and motioned at the adults.

Hawks rose and smiled at Eri. "Looks like I'm needed. I'll be right back. Keep Mockingjay company while I'm gone, okay?"

Eri glanced at Mockingjay and nodded hesitantly.

Hawks followed the police out and down the hall. "Want to share your thoughts, Detective?"

Tsukauchi looked worried. "I'd bet my badge her 'curse' is a Quirk. But her mention of a 'disease' in relation to it is what really worries me. We might want to contact Eraserhead."

Hawks's heart pounded with both excitement and slight dread.

But why? He wasn't an Eraserhead fanboy or anything.

Something nagged at him but he could not figure it out. He pushed it aside.

"I'll let you do that. I'd probably annoy him too much." He turned to look at the police officer. "So what did you pull us away for?"

"We got a picture of the person who dropped off the girl." the officer reported. He led them to the security room and pulled a monitor close. "They did something to all the cameras in the area. This is the only image we've got."

Hawks studied the black-clothed, masked figure that stared directly at the camera. Or seemed to, at least. It was difficult to tell since their mask had no eye-holes. "They let us see this."

"Most definitely." Tsukauchi agreed. "What do you think?"

Hawks studied the image. "The costume looks incomplete." He murmured. "It's good quality, but it seems like a prototype. The mask appears to be inspired by a Venetian bauta mask. It lacks the nose and eyeholes and the chin is less pointed but the shape is similar enough for there to be a connection."

Tsukauchi rubbed his chin. "So we have someone named 'Ennea'— of Greek or Latin origin — running around in a pseudo-Venetian mask— of Italian origin. I cannot tell if they're committing to a theme or not."

Hawks raised an eyebrow. "Why would they want a theme? They're not marketing to anybody like Pro Heroes do. Plus that could make them easier to identity if they accidentally carry it over to their civilian self."

"You don't think they're a licensed Hero?" Tsukauchi questioned, though Hawks suspected he already thought the same and was only asking rhetorically. Or he just wanted to see how Hawks responded to a possible Vigilante, who according to their laws was a criminal.

Hawks considered his answer carefully. "It's not impossible that they are. Eri said they said it was 'dangerous' if they stayed, so they might have left so quickly to take care of something. They could be a new underground Hero, or an old one that's taking on a new moniker. You know some Heroes do that if they feel their old image doesn't suit them anymore."

Tsukauchi hummed noncommittally. "If they're a Hero they'll come forward soon with their license. If not… they're a Vigilante."

They saved a little girl, Hawks thought but did not say. He knew better than to voice negative opinions about Hero Society's laws.

Tsukauchi sighed. "If they are a Vigilante, that could cause some problems for our investigation. The law always gets stingy when vigilante justice is involved in a case. Vigilantes may think they're helping, but sometimes criminals go free because they weren't brought in by the book."

Okay, *screw* not voicing his opinion.

"You are *not* sending her back to whatever bastards call themselves her 'family'." Hawks snarled.

Tsukauchi raised his hands in a peaceful gesture. "If they were a Vigilante who just kidnapped a child— an abused child, but still a child— I might have to. But luckily this 'Ennea' knew what they were doing. They dropped her off at a Hero Agency and convinced her to *tell you* she needed help. That and her injuries alone will open up an investigation. Her father could walk through that door and demand her back and he won't get her."

Hawks relaxed. "I apologize for my assumption."

"Don't. Your ferocity puts me at ease." Tsukauchi admitted openly.

Hawks hummed and scowled at the floor. "I *hate* people who hurt kids."

"I'd be concerned if you didn't." Tsukauchi said with deceptive lightness. He checked his phone and sighed. "I'll try to get into contact with Eraserhead. Most of his students should be at their internships but he may not be able to come in until tonight."

"I'll stay here and watch Eri." Hawks offered. "She seems to trust me a little. And my interns are going to arrive soon. Maybe seeing people closer to her age will help her feel more at ease."

Tsukauchi studied him from under the brim of his hat. "Do you have any idea how you may have 'helped and believed' Ennea?"

"Not a clue." Hawks said regretfully. "I save hundreds of people every day. Many I don't even know the face of. A connection to me doesn't exactly shrink the pool."

"That would be too easy." Tsukauchi sighed. He tipped his hat. "I suppose I will see you again soon."

"Next time bring food." Hawks chirped.

Tsukauchi chuckled and headed out with his officers. Hawks watched them go, then went to the kitchen. He may as well make coffee. He needed it and Tokoyami certainly would when he, Todoroki, and Iida arrived in half an hour.

Something in his head *lurched*.

Hawks staggered into the wall and leaned on it for balance, gasping as his breath stuck in his throat.

"***God**, that was difficult!"* a voice croaked in his mind.

Hawks jumped a foot in the air. *Huh—?* Something clicked and pain lanced through his head. His eyes grew round. *What—? You—? How did you—?*

"***You can remember last night and our mission**."* Purple ordered.

Hawks flinched as the remaining memories rushed back. He caught himself on the wall and took a breath. *You brainwashed me into forgetting. What the **hell**.*

"*For your safety."* Purple said, an apology in his voice. *"You couldn't know anything about Eri when they came to question you."*

*You erased my memories of **you** , too.*

"*...Technically I brainwashed you into not remembering us for a bit."* Purple said weakly.

Hawks laid his head on the wall and took a breather. *Remember that transparency thing you promised? That's part of the things I want to know about **beforehand**.*

Green cleared his throat awkwardly. *"About that..."*

His thoughts brushed Hawks's, showing flashes of *his* hands creating pieces of a familiar costume.

At night *and* during the day.

Hawks put two and two together.

He went numb. *You guys… used my body while I was drifting. And asleep. To prepare for the mission.*

"*Yes."* Green admitted.

"***We're so sorry**."* all of them whispered.

Hawks felt icy cold, as if someone had taken all the warmth out of his chest.

...Oh.

This was not like with Orange, who tried to take control while Hawks was conscious.

They used his body while he was *stuck in his head or asleep*.

Without telling him.

When he could not say no.

He *never* would have known they took control if they did not tell him.

They did this *behind his back*.

He *never would have known*.

He should have figured it out. There was no way Red managed to create all that stuff on her first try, in one night. He should have known they *lied to him*. But they had been honest now and he wanted to encourage honesty so he shouldn't feel upset *right?!* They had done it to reach Eri quicker so it was perfectly okay and fine and reasonable and not at all *horrifying* because this was *his body* they had used like an *empty doll—*

"*Wasn't that fun, my Angel? Will you be a good Hero now?*"

Repress. Repress. Repress repress ***repress***—

Thank you for being honest.

Change the subject.

Change it.

Now.

So. Ennea, huh? 'Nine' isn't very inventive.

If Green noticed his desperate subject change, he had the tact not to mention it. *"It felt fitting."*

Why not just use 'Nine' then?

"*A Villain we might face in the future was called 'Nine'."*

Ah.

He dropped that equally touchy subject, put on a smile, returned to the kitchen, and made coffee.

His interns arrived half an hour later. By then, Hawks was back in his 'I am *not* freaking out everything is *fiiiine*' state of mind and his smile managed to be real.

"Good morning, my wonderful interns! Someone unexpected showed up last night so we're doing something a little different today." He let his smile fade. "A little girl showed up at the Kettle last night. She's a bit easily frightened so be the nicest yous you can be, okay?"

"It is a good thing Bakugo is not here then." Todoroki said solemnly.

Iida looked scandalized. "Todoroki, do not say such things about our classmate!" He paused to think it over. "…Though you *do* have a point."

Orange made a strangled, angry sound at the back of Hawks's mind. He struggled not to smile. It became easier not to when he remembered what the voices had done—

Don't *think about it. Focus on Eri.*

"I know this isn't what you expected on your last day," he said, but *not* apologetically because he would never apologize for helping a little girl feel welcome. "But she could really use some company."

"I do not mind at all." Iida said instantly.

Hawks led them into the kitchen where Eri was waiting. She had been previously warned about the three newcomers and did not flee when they came in. She stayed at the table, eyes fearful and wary, with a red crayon squeezed in her hand.

"*Okay, why aren't we kicking Overhaul's ass right now?"* Purple growled.

Hawks repressed a flinch at his voice. Luckily, Purple did not appear to notice.

"*Because we'd need at least a warrant to legally search the Shie Hassaikai compound and if we kicked his butt as a Vigilante, the charges might not stick."* Pink reminded him.

"*The yakuza has lost power but political corruption is still a factor to consider, and there are types who would use a Vigilante arrest as an excuse to get the case dropped."* Silver added.

"*Right. We do this legally so he can't walk free."* Green stated, though Hawks could tell he was convincing himself too.

Hawks kept his grin casual. "Eri, these are the Heroes in training I told you about. Todoroki, Iida, and Tokoyami."

Eri's gaze jerked to and locked onto Tokoyami as her eyes went round. The crayon in her hand broke, and a small piece fell onto her drawing. She inched backwards, just enough to be

noticeable, and the sleeve of her dress shifted, revealing bandages and a couple scars.

Hawks noticed Todoroki's reaction first, if only because he had *never* heard the quiet intern make such a sound before. It was only a short breathing noise, as if he had inhaled sharply between his teeth, but Hawks could see the tendons in his throat quivering as he clenched his jaw. Before he could worry that he might need to pull Todoroki aside, his intern pulled himself together, adapting a neutral expression.

"I am so happy to meet you, Eri!" Iida greeted the girl first.

"Hello, young one." Tokoyami said gravely.

As his turn came, Todoroki stared at Eri. His expression was strangely stiff, and he seemed pale. Hawks followed his gaze and saw he was looking at some of her scars. Before he had to intervene, Todoroki jerked his gaze away, to her face. His expression noticeably softened.

"Hello."

Was it just Hawks's imagination, or did his voice shake, like he could not manage more than that word? He stood next to Eri and gave her the gentlest nudge.

"Do you want to say 'hi' back, Starling?" he whispered.

She studied her shoes, which were borrowed like the rest of her outfit because she had been barefoot. "Hi..."

She glanced at Iida and Todoroki for a second but still avoided looking at Tokoyami. Her tiny hands gripped her dress, fingers going white. Hawks motioned for the interns to take a few steps back and crouched next to her. Eri glanced at him and— to his surprise and maybe hope (*maybe she trusted him*)— scooted closer to him. She proceeded to hide her face in his wing. It would be adorable if she did not look so worried. She spoke quietly to Hawks, as if admitting a terrible secret.

"I don't like his beak."

If Tokoyami was hurt by the admission he did not show it.

Hawks did not try to convince Eri she should not feel that way. He had confidence he could coax her out of that associative type of fear over time, but now was *not* it. Not when Eri had been away from Overhaul and his plague-masked goons for less than a day. Saying she was wrong would only make things worse, and there would be time for her to adjust, change, and not associate beak-like faces with Overhaul and his men.

And so the three UA students spent the last day of their internship reading stories and playing games with a nervous little girl. Hawks hung back for the most part. Partially because he did not want to scare Eri if he left, partially because he felt dead on his feet. Between his own work, Ennea, Eri's arrival, and the voices' past nights— *How many times had they ~~don't think~~* — his hours of sleep this week were in the abysmal range.

Eri did not smile once, but she seemed to understand none of them were going to hurt her. Hawks hoped so, at least. It was only the first day. She had time to adapt, and hopefully heal.

Unfortunately, his interns were out of time. Their lessons with his agency were over for now. He really wished these internships lasted longer like they usually did. Despite his earlier misgivings, he'd love to have more time to help these kids grow and learn. He would have to wait until next time, however. Hopefully their teachers at UA would step it up in his place. After all, it was not like he could get a position there to continue their lessons. Maybe he could snag them during the next internship period? He would take what he could get.

XXXXXXX

Before they all knew it, the day was over. If Hawks wanted to, he could have sulked or pouted dramatically as he bade his interns goodbye, because *darn it*, it turned out he *liked* teaching these kids. When training was training and not glorified beatings where he got it right or got bruises and cuts, it was actually pretty fun. Who would have thought?

"Alas, your time at the much-beloved Kettle has come to an end." Hawks sighed as he met with them in the lobby one final time.

"Will there be more work studies in the future?" Iida asked rather hopefully.

Yes. "Probably. If you believe there's more to learn here, think about coming back. Or— as I always say— you can call whenever you like with questions and stuff."

"You've already taught us so much, Hawks-sensei." Tokoyami said.

Hawks pretended to hide a blush. "Aww, you flatter me! Is it too late to admit I've been teaching by the seat of my pants and had no idea what I was doing? So please, be honest and tell me if I sucked at teaching you."

"That isn't true at all." Todoroki intoned with a solemn shake of his head. "I have had bad teachers before. You are not one of them."

An indiscernible emotion bubbled through the voices but they slammed the doors shut before Hawks could try to identify it.

"Cool." he cleared his throat. "Regardless, you'll probably hear from me soon. We're going to be taking Eri somewhere safe for a few days. She'd love it if you visited. Now then—" He clapped his gloved hands and rubbed them together. "—who's ready for some mushy melodramatic heart-to-heart goodbye stuff? My little fledglings are almost ready to fly." He wiped away an imaginary tear.

Tokoyami groaned. "Please never call us that again."

Hawks grinned wickedly.

Tokoyami covered his face. "I have doomed us all. What a mad banquet of darkness…"

"*Yes! He said it!"* Yellow shouted. *"**Finally**! I've been waiting all week."*

Hawks's smile stayed in place as he rejected his unease to the far reaches of his mind that even the voices could not reach.

Sensing his joke about heart-to-hearts was not completely a joke, his interns separated a bit to give each other some privacy. Good on them. Hawks said bye to Tenya Iida first, who was surprisingly the least worrisome of his interns in the end.

Wait, since when did Todoroki become a concern—?

Hawks shook that thought away and smiled at Iida. "So. How'd you like working here? Did you find what you were looking for?"

"I found what I did not know I needed to find, if that makes any sense." Iida said with his usual focused seriousness. "I assure you that you have taught me well. Not just for my Quirk but for how I will conduct myself as a Hero." He adjusted his glasses by the edge. "I must find strength in myself, but I have others to rely on for help. I have taken that lesson to heart."

"Good." Hawks said warmly. "You kids are strong but you're always stronger together. Remember that."

"I will." Iida declared.

Hawks moved to Tokoyami next. His fellow bird-hero looked a bit gloomier than usual, and Hawks suspected it was not just because the internship was over.

He put a hand on his black-cloaked shoulder and spoke lowly. "Are you okay, Tokoyami? I understand if you're upset about what Eri said…"

Tokoyami shook his bird-like head. "I am fine, Hawks-sensei. I know it was not her intention to be malicious."

Hawks let his hand drop and crossed his arms. "That's true for her. For others, not so much." he said bluntly. "When I have to model, some of the photographers are disgusted by my third eyelid. They don't say it, but they recoil when I don't blink with my human ones."

Tokoyami's eyes were wide. "People…" Hawks could practically see the word '*fear*' on his tongue. "...don't like your differences?"

"They don't like the 'creepy' ones." Hawks scoffed. He allowed himself to smirk almost bitterly. "I'm 'lucky' enough to have a 'pretty' mutation. Humanity always had a fascination with winged humanoids so I'm more accepted as long as I don't show my bird side much. So you know what I do?" He prodded Tokoyami in the shoulder. "I blink at them with my third eye. I stare at them in the dark. I move just a little too fast and just a little too quietly. You know why? Because you do *not* have to put up with their narrow-mindedness. Their prejudices are on *them*, not you. Don't let them try to tell you how to be human, got it?"

Tokoyami's beak opened and closed wordlessly.

Hawks grinned with just too many teeth, revealing his eyeteeth were just a *bit* too sharp compared to a 'normal' humans'. "I chose you to be my intern because I saw missed potential,

and because we bird people need to stick together." He cocked his head. "That's the question you kept thinking about, right?"

"Yes." Tokoyami whispered. He abruptly bowed. "Thank you, Hawks-sensei."

"Just telling it how it is." Hawks said lightly and moved on.

Finally, he spoke with Todoroki. There was a buzzing in the back of his mind as he approached his quiet intern— was Todoroki always *this* quiet?— but he chalked it up to the voices being themselves.

"Sorry I couldn't teach you all about socializing like you hoped, Shoto."

Mismatched eyes blinked up at him. "I did not expect you to in a week. However, you have taught me well with the time we had."

"And I'll teach you more if you call." Hawks said brightly. "I can be pretty busy, but I'd love to keep teaching you, if you want it. Mostly because it'll give me an excuse to talk a ton." He grinned.

Todoroki did not smile back. He still looked far too solemn. Almost like Eri did. "Can I call about… other questions? About non-Hero things, that is?"

"Of course." Hawks said. "You can ask me about anything. Except dating." He wrinkled his nose. "I don't know if it's because I never had time for it, but romance doesn't particularly interest me." *Or that weird tango stuff I'm **not** discussing with a teenager because I am not a health teacher. Nopety to the **hell nope**.*

"*Did you seriously call sex 'weird tango stuff'?"* Yellow snorted. *"Are you **twelve**?"*

That stung, just a bit, but Hawks was used to laughter, scoffs, and disbelief if he ever shared his disinterest in dating and bringing people home for the night. Only Mockingjay seemed to really get it because even Miruko had given him an odd look the first time he mentioned that he wasn't interested in girls, guys, or… *anyone* really. It was like sushi. Some people wanted and or liked it, others didn't. Hawks just happened to be in the 'didn't want' category.

I can call it what I want, Hawks thought mutinously.

Yellow kept chuckling.

"Hawks-sensei?" He brought his attention back to Todoroki. "May I ask a question now?"

Hawks tipped his head. "You always can."

Todoroki shifted from foot to foot and looked everywhere except at Hawks. "…Was Eri's father the one that hurt her?"

Something jiggled in Hawks's mind like the loose piece to a puzzle, but it refused to click together. "It's still under investigation but the signs are pointing towards a man claiming to be her father."

Todoroki's eyes dropped. "How can you be sure?"

"What do you mean by that?" Hawks kept his tone calm and not accusing, because he knew Todoroki better than to think he thought Eri was lying.

"How can you be sure she's telling the truth?" Todoroki elaborated, misunderstanding him.

There was something heavy in that question. Something unsaid.

The voices were creating pressure in his head again, like they tended to do when they struggled to keep their emotions within their walls.

Hawks's skin crawled.

"She said she needed help, and I believe her." Hawks did not know why he said that. He just felt like it *needed* to be said. "I'll *always* believe a kid who needs my help. Just like she believed I would help her." Something cold rippled through the voices, creeping into his body like an illness, and his fists clenched. "Maybe we abused kids are just good at recognizing each other…"

"*You said 'we.'"* Green whispered.

Hawks remembered lonely white walls and apathetic stares. He remembered panic so great he could hardly breathe as he struggled to do everything his trainers asked, knowing he would be punished if he did anything less than perfectly. He remembered approaching footsteps symbolizing he needed to stop using his feathers for frivolous things like trying to find joy in his own Quirk.

He remembered learning how to manipulate people into calming down through promises that they could punish him later, because he didn't want *them* to get into trouble, *truly*. He remembered taking lessons from his early childhood and refusing to cry, because tears would get him no sympathy. He remembered curling up in bed after a particularly grueling training session, in so much pain he could hardly move. He remembered looking into the mirror at his own body and wondering if he was even a person, or just a weapon to be used until he broke.

Todoroki was staring at him. There was something hauntingly familiar in his expression. Not *hopelessness*, but something close, as if a thing he desperately desired was just out of his reach.

It reminded Hawks of Eri's face.

Hawks's hands were shaking.

Why were they shaking?

He hid them in his pockets. "Is there anything else you would like to discuss?"

"I…" Todoroki's eyes locked with his and darted away, to the floor. "No, sensei."

Why did Hawks feel so disappointed? It was true Todoroki was being quieter than usual since he saw Eri— Hawks's heartbeat quickened.— and he seemed to have realized she had been abused from the moment he saw her— *That… it was **obvious**. Sure, Eri could have been kidnapped or taken by Quirk Traffickers or the like but surely it was obvious enough that it was abuse.*— but then why had he immediately assumed it was her *father* that did it?

Jagged bits and pieces forced themselves together like a car crash in slow motion and Hawks's throat closed up.

He cleared it. "Remember, I'm just a call away if you change your mind."

Todoroki did not reply verbally. He merely nodded, which felt like less of an agreement than it should be. He walked away, and Hawks opened his mouth to stop him but forced himself to remain silent.

Hawks watched his interns go in silence, even as he planted on a smile and waved goodbye. As soon as they were gone, his smile and hand dropped.

A numb feeling spread through his body, making him almost feel as if he were drifting, but he remained crisply, cruelly aware of his surroundings and thoughts. Things were coming together like pieces of a horrific puzzle, and as much as he wanted to, his better nature would not let him sit in denial of what they showed.

Endeavor's attempt at controlling Shoto's life for him when his son chose Hawks's Agency instead of his father's. The voices' dislike of Endeavor and their desire to keep something about him from Hawks. Miruko's suspicions about the mysteriously unmentioned Todoroki siblings. The voices' insistence that revealing what Endeavor did could break Hero Society, especially if he became the Number One Hero.

Todoroki's obvious confusion at how training worked with Hawks. His bewilderment at being able to ask questions without repercussions. His instantaneous understanding that Eri had been abused. His intimate horror as he saw her scars. His *immediate* assumption that Eri's *father* had been the one to do this to her—

Hawks called Mockingjay and told her to stay with Eri because he needed a couple minutes.

He ran to his office.

He shut the door.

He sat at his desk, and slumped in his chair, staring unblinkingly at the ceiling.

White, tell me the truth. Does Endeavor abuse his family?

This time White—*Shoto Todoroki*— did not try to hide his thoughts.

There was no point in trying to douse an inferno with a handful of melting snow.

"Yes."

Hold Your Tongue (Or We'll Do It For You)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hawks did not have time to mope. He didn't *let* himself have time. Eri needed cheerful and happy Hawks, not a Hawks that was wavering between the desire to punch Endeavor through a wall and a complete mental breakdown. The latter compulsion was close to winning. White had finally revealed the finer details of his childhood to him, and Hawks was ashamed to admit that his sympathy and horror were slightly overshadowed by his own self-centered guilt.

*I looked up to him. I **idolized** him. And yet he did **this.** To his **own family**...*

Years of "training" —*abuse*— for Shoto and Touya. Years of neglect for Fuyumi and Natsuo. Pushing his wife to a mental breakdown and putting her in a mental institution for the next ten years. *Something* terrible with his eldest that White still refused to talk about, shutting down so completely Hawks barely felt his presence at all.

Hawks felt dirty and disgusting just by association. Like he himself had condoned what Endeavor had done by failing to notice it happened. It wasn't like Endeavor had done anything to tip him off— family matters were kept private by default, even for Heroes— but surely there was something Hawks could have seen sooner? Surely he should have *noticed*? Could he truly be that blind?

Adding to the absolute horror he felt from the *definitely not worldview-shattering* nature of his recent realizations, Hawks was dead on his feet. It caused him to drift more easily than usual, complete with flashes of a young White— Shoto— *sobbing on the floor next to a pile of his own vomit as Endeavor loomed over him—*

Hawks almost vomited himself as the memory blurred and he smelled burning flesh. But the memories kept forcing their way in, brutal and raw like gaping wounds. He knew what his nightmares would be about tonight.

His hands wouldn't stop shaking. He held another cup of coffee to try to still them as he waited for Eraserhead at the facility Eri would be staying at for now— Eri, who needed him to be calm and reassuring and happy and *not* distraught and angry and *how could I be so **blind**?* The liquid rippled no matter how much he willed it to be still.

"We're so sorry, Gold." Green said softly. *"We didn't want you to find out like this."*

*Under **what** circumstances would this somehow affect me less?*

"*None."* Green admitted. *"But it could have happened at a better time. We didn't want to add more to your plate. Plus, it's not like you can do much with this… information unless one of the Todorokis comes forward. Almost everything that happened was within the privacy of*

*their home, and it's not like Endeavor kept videos of his actions. Believe it or not, this matter actually **is** private. There's no great conspiracy or cover up to expose."*

The Commission actually doesn't know something for once, Hawks thought without humor. *Scratch that. They **might** suspect, but that's it.*

"*Most likely they don't care to look."* Orange growled. *"Endeavor's just doing what they did, right? Get a kid with a powerful Quirk and force them to be a Hero—"*

Hawks repressed a twitch. His lips twisted into a snarl. ***Don't** compare our pasts like it's some damn competition!* He snapped.

Orange jumped, notably startled.

Hawks wanted to scream and throw things. He wanted to storm into Endeavor's office and demand to know how he could call himself a Hero. He wanted to curl up and cry.

He did none of those things and forced himself to calm down.

Sorry. I'm a bit on edge. S-Sorry. I— He put a hand to his head and forced himself to keep breathing. In and out and in and out and in and out and— *I'm so **sorry**, Shoto. I should have noticed I should have investigated sooner I should have done **something** I should have—*

"*Gold, **stop**."* White commanded. *"You've only been a Pro Hero for four years. By the time you even became a Hero and met Endeavor, my training had been going on for six. You had **no** reason to investigate him or suspect anything. My friends only knew what happened before it was revealed to the public because I told them myself. To the outside world, Endeavor is an asshole but a good Hero. They don't know he's a shitty father. It's not your fault you admired him, and I'm **not** angry that you did."*

Hawks dropped his gaze and watched his coffee ripple. *Okay. Breathing. Dealing. **Okay**.* He chugged the drink and threw the cup away. *I can't believe **you** have to comfort **me** when you're the one who went through that.*

'*Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face. You are a hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

"*Screw that notion."* White— yes, *White*— growled.

Hawks ignored him because he already had enough to deal with. Like Eri. And Endeavor. And Shoto. And the fact that the voices had *taken control of his body—* Not dealing with that now. Stay calm. Hawks ignored the voices' guilt. *One problem at a time.*

"*I've had a few years to deal with my emotions and past."* White continued as if Hawks had not been on the verge of hyperventilating. *"My friends helped."*

The voices' touched feelings brushed at Hawks's consciousness. He tried not to shy away from them.

Focusing on more present issues, he thought. *Aizawa's supposed to arrive soon. Are you going to be okay?*

"*I do not know."* Silver admitted gravely. *"I cannot predict how we will react. He was our beloved teacher and his death was… unpleasant."*

Hawks caught a flash of a pool of blood and writhing black mist—

"*Gold."* Purple's serious voice drew his attention. *"Be careful how you act around Aizawa. If you give off those 'stray' vibes of yours he might try to adopt you."*

Hawks snorted.

"*I'm not joking."* Purple said flatly.

On cue, the door at the end of the hall opened and a familiar Hero stepped through. Hawks took in messy black clothes, ragged dark hair, and tired eyes before his throat tightened.

"*Aizawa-sensei..."* Green whispered.

To Hawks's horror, his vision blurred. He doubted his visor hid the tears in his eyes. His suspicions were instantly proven correct when Aizawa saw him. His lips dipped into the slightest frown.

"Are you alright?"

*Guys… I **hate** you all.*

"I'm *great*." Hawks lied, voice choked. "Just… had a bit of a day." He took a breath. "Thanks for coming so soon."

"It would be illogical to delay." Aizawa stated and the voices' tearful nostalgia nearly strangled Hawks.

He swallowed roughly and forced himself to at least *pretend* to not be an emotional wreck. "Eri's this way. She's a bit tired from everything that's gone on today but I think she's afraid to sleep."

"She does not seem to be the only one who is tired." Aizawa said.

"*Red alert! He's already dad-ing."* Yellow shouted. *"This is not a drill!"*

Quiet, you.

Hawks hummed vaguely in response to Aizawa and led him to Eri's room. His own sidekicks had volunteered to guard Eri at Hawks's request, not questioning why the little girl might need so much protection. In fact, if any of them grumbled about the extra work, Hawks might just kick them out of his Agency because they could damn well be compassionate enough to want to help a scared little girl.

As he halted outside, Hawks shoved away all thoughts of the future and Endeavor and the voices' actions and *focused*. He tapped on Eri's door and entered, all signs of his earlier distress shoved deep down. "I'm back, Starling! Just like I promised."

The little girl was sitting at a small child's table near the corner. The entirety of the space was filled with drawings. Hawks recognized his wings in a few of the pictures, along with Shoto's unique hairstyle.

*Eri needs you to **focus**.*

Eri looked up, spotting Aizawa and immediately darted to Hawks's side. She clung to his leg, hiding behind him so he was between her and the stranger. Hawks gently curled his wing around her.

"I know you must be tired from meeting all these new people but I need you to see one more. This is Eraserhead. He's another Hero." Hawks lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "He may look grumpy but he's actually *really* nice. I think he's a cat person, too. Don't let him know I told you."

Eri stared at him in that heartbreaking, nervous way of hers and silently nodded as if she were taking his words to heart. She was way too solemn for a six year-old. Hawks wished she could smile.

"*She will one day."* Green promised.

Aizawa slowly approached and crouched so he was eye level with Eri. "Are those your pictures on the table? They're wonderful. You're very talented."

Okay, whoever claimed Eraserhead was terrible with kids was either blind or lying. Eri hesitantly peeked out from under Hawks wing and retreated again. Hawks coaxed her back to the table and all three of them took a seat.

It was kind of funny, seeing the serious Eraserhead sitting in a plastic chair that was much too small for him. Hawks knew he probably looked equally strange but he was still almost half a foot shorter then poor Aizawa, who looked close to eating his knees.

Aizawa did not ask Eri any questions, unlike many of her other visitors. The only purpose of his visit was for Eri to get used to his presence. It worked, albeit slowly. Eri went from doing her best to vanish into Hawks's wings to returning to her drawings, hesitantly shooting glances at Aizawa every few seconds.

The amount of worried stares slowly decreased until Eri was able to focus on her pictures. Hawks made a note to grab some more children's books and toys to bring with him tomorrow. He could afford to buy a few cheap things for her. Well, not really *afford* if his suspicions about his increased monthly bills were any indication, but he could not bear to leave her with only a few things to play with.

The introduction went perfectly fine until it was time to leave. As soon as Hawks mentioned it was time to go and rose, Eri dropped her crayon and looked at him with raw fear in her

eyes.

"Don't leave me."

"I'm not, Starling." Hawks promised. "I have to go for a little while but I'll be back tomorrow."

Her eyes watered but she said nothing and her gaze dropped to the floor. For a moment, Hawks thought she might cry, but instead she gripped his hand and pulled on it. Hawks obligingly knelt and— to his shock— she flung her arms around him. Hawks carefully hugged her back. The surprise on her face— because he returned her embrace?— almost broke him.

How could Overhaul hurt her so much that any sign of kindness shocked her? How could Endeavor hurt Shoto and his family while claiming to be a Hero worthy of the Number One spot? *How could the voices hurt and betray and use him like that?*

Eri did not cry as Hawks and Aizawa left. He could not tell if she wanted to. He was at his limit and completely drained both physically and emotionally. But his job still wasn't done. Heroes did not stop when they got tired.

"Will you be able to come back as well?" Hawks asked as he walked back down the hall with Aizawa.

"Perhaps." he said vaguely. "I have teaching and my own Hero work to do."

Despite his claim, Hawks knew feeling he would drop everything if he thought Eri needed him. And to Aizawa, "needed" was a very vaguely defined word. He could watch and help Eri when Hawks couldn't. "Just so you know, my interns— three of your students— spent the day with Eri today. They might ask to come visit her."

"That is acceptable." Aizawa intoned. His dark eyes were sharp. "Were there any problems?"

Does he suspect Shoto—?

"*No."* White said shortly.

Hawks wondered if that was true. "There was a bit of friction between her and Tokoyami. Eri was uncomfortable with his beak specifically. I talked to him but he might still be upset." An idea struck him. "We should check around for incidents involving beak-like masks. Maybe plague masks."

"Careful." Green warned sharply, and Hawks denied that his heart missed a beat.

Aizawa nodded thoughtfully. "Has she had any Quirk outbursts?"

Hawks wished he could just pass on the voices' information without dooming them all. "Nothing yet."

"So we still have no idea what her Quirk might be."

"Not a clue." Hawks chose his next words carefully. "Based on what she's said, it might be something extremely destructive." *What's her Quirk again*?

"*Rewind."* Green answered.

Oh, right. It lets her… A thought struck him and he forced himself not to light up with excitement. *Wait, maybe she could rewind the Nomu—*

Hawks glimpsed a flicker of a bloody mess of brains and body parts and swallowed a gag. Their misery— painful and raw like a gaping wound— almost took his breath away and he realized how foolish that hopeful thought had been. They came from ten years in the future, a future where Eri had been with them, growing and learning how to control her Quirk. *Of course* they tried to use Eri's Quirk to rewind the Nomu back to who they used to be. Tried, and *failed*.

Thankfully, Aizawa did not appear to notice Hawks's onslaught of dismay. He rubbed his eyes. "Depending on how dangerous it is, UA may need to take custody so I'm nearby."

"Maybe you should preemptively get that ball rolling? Just to be safe?" *Please do*, Hawks thought. *Otherwise the Commission might try to nab her.* "Eri shouldn't be stuck here. She needs a friendlier environment with less plain white walls."

Black eyes bore into him. "She's attached to you. Why don't you take her?"

Okay, that was just *cruel*. Hawks knew Aizawa was smarter than that. He knew Hawks could not adopt Eri, so he was likely prodding for information. What a *jerk*, acting like Hawks could even hope to take care of a kid. Still, he might as well oblige him.

"I wish I could but it's impossible." Hawks shook his head resignedly. "I can't reliably care for her. I can't take care of *myself* half the time. I sink into my head sometimes and I'm out of the apartment all day— an apartment that's technically my friend's by the way since I can't afford one. If the social workers looked at my finances I wonder what they'd think of the debts the Commission—" Hawks belatedly remembered who he was talking to. "Uh."

Aizawa was staring at him intently. "What do you mean you 'sink into your head'?"

"*It has been done. Dadzawa mode has been activated."* Yellow intoned. *"Accept your fate."*

I blame all of you for this.

"*How is it **our** fault?"* Pink spluttered.

You influenced me and made me comfortable enough around him to let things slip. And your bad habits have infected me.

Aizawa was still staring at him expecting an answer.

"Exactly what I said." Hawks said defensively. "It won't affect my performance at work."

Aizawa's eyes narrowed.

Screw it, he was already doomed. "I go nonverbal sometimes, too. I couldn't put Eri through that."

Was that pity or understanding on Aizawa's face? "I see."

"We now see the Dadzawa give his natural response, cultivated through eons of evolution." Yellow narrated.

Oh be quiet, you. Hawks repressed a groan. He remembered something he thought of earlier but did not think he'd have the chance to test so soon. "Oh! Since you're here— and I know this is weird to ask— could you use your Quirk on me?" He flicked his wings. "I'm curious what would happen."

Aizawa's black eyebrows crept up his forehead. "You *want* me to use my Quirk on you?"

Hawks nodded and let his wings flare up. "Yeah. I want to know what it'll do." *And I'd rather find out what happens now instead of during a fight.*

"Why would you fight—" Green remembered All For One's ability to steal Quirks. And the Nomu. The lack of accompanying traumatic memories told Hawks that being turned into a Nomu had not been the future Eraserhead's fate. *"Ah."*

You can never be too paranoid.

Hawks blinked to see Aizawa was directly in front of him.

He did not gasp and flinch back.

No, he most definitely did *not*.

That *look* was back on Aizawa's face.

Hawks forced a smile. "Like I said, I sink into my head sometimes. It won't affect my performance at work."

Dark eyes thinned to suspicious slits. "You already said that."

"I have to keep on script." Hawks quipped.

Aizawa was still staring.

"It's too late for the hawk." Yellow said dramatically. *"The Dadzawa has spotted his stray. Now he will never let him go—"*

Shush. Aizawa's too young to act like my dad.

"That's not going to stop him. Like Purple said: you got that stray vibe."

I do not. Hawks tucked his hands into his pockets. "But back to my curiosity…"

"Fine." Aizawa agreed flatly.

"Yep, he's worried about you." Purple sighed.

How can you tell?

"He agreed too quickly."

I'm guessing you speak fluent Aizawa-speak.

"We all do."

Hawks planted his feet on the ground in case his balance was affected. "Whenever you're ready."

Aizawa's eyes turned red and his hair floated up. Hawks wondered if tying it back would help keep his Quirk more subtle when he had goggles on.

...Green was really rubbing off on him, okay?

Then his wings were paralyzed. He could still feel them, and move them with a lot of effort but he could not detach his feathers.

"*That's so creepy."* Pink squeaked.

"*It is rather disturbing."* Silver said more diplomatically, though he was also uncomfortable.

That answered Hawks's other question. Aizawa's Erasure did not affect the voices. Hawks breathed steadily, in and out, and reminded himself his wings were still there and not shorn from his back. The uncomfortable feeling faded and he flexed his wings.

"I got incomplete paralysis. Can move my wings a bit but I can't move my individual feathers."

"Ennea will be unaffected." Green mumbled. *"Our skin is completely covered and none of our clothing will shift to reveal it."*

Hawks had not known that was a limit of Erasure. He supposed it made sense since Erasure did not work through things like walls. He made a note to slice the clothes of completely covered enemies with his feathers if the need arose.

"Thanks for indulging my curiosity." he said genuinely.

"There are more annoying things to be curious about." Aizawa grumbled. "I look forward to seeing what you taught my brats."

"*He's **making conversation** instead of retreating to his sleeping bag."* Yellow groaned.*"He's definitely worried about you."*

Great. "Yeah..." Hawks's smile slipped. "Some of the lessons I gave them I didn't think they had to learn. Do they always try to give you a heart attack with the stuff they pull?"

"Every other day, if I'm lucky." he muttered.

Hawks chuckled. "Sounds fun. Still, they're good kids. If you ever need help teaching them anything, give me a call, yeah?"

"Hmm."

Aizawa did not scoff at his request or shut him down for wasting his time. That seemed like a step in the right direction with someone that had been so important in the voices' pasts but Hawks felt they were the opposite of pleased. In fact, they seemed rather resigned.

What's wrong? Is his reaction that out of character?

"*Yes, it is."* Red sighed.

"*Aizawa either likes you already— not likely— believes in your abilities— possibly— or all these red flags are popping up in his head and he thinks you may need help—"* Green stopped himself and slumped in defeat. *"Who am I kidding? Yeah, it's the last one."*

There was a pause.

Then Pink groaned.

"*We are so screwed."*

"Is there anything else?" Aizawa asked, not quite irritated. "I need to grade papers."

Hawks's thoughts went back to Shoto and he hesitated. Aizawa was Shoto's homeroom teacher. If anyone was in a position to talk to him about his home life, it would be him. Hawks could not outright accuse Endeavor of child abuse— and not just because he did *not* want to have that conversation right now— but even without the voices' confirmation, he would still share his suspicions.

Hawks steeled his resolve. "Eraserhead—"

"*Don't."* White said lowly.

Not listening. I know you think it's useless but Aizawa is Shoto's teacher—

"*This isn't your decision to make."*

*Like **hell** it isn't.*

White's normally level voice grew angrier.*"It's **my** life you're interfering with."*

*No, it's **not**. It's younger Shoto's. I can't just stand by and not say anything when Endeavor is —*

"*Yes you can."* Purple said.

Hawks tried not to respond.

Truly, he *tried*.

But he couldn't stop himself from thinking.

*No, I can't. I **refuse**.* Icy fear tore through Hawks's veins as he realized what he had done. *Nonono. **Please don't I'M SORRY**—*

"***You will not speak of—"***

"*STOP! HE'S NOT A THREAT!"* Pink screamed.

Purple stopped.

He stopped before the command could take hold.

Hawks felt hands on his shoulders first. He realized Eraserhead was the person holding him, and that the other man had been speaking. He also belatedly realized his chest felt tight, like he'd had severe anxiety. And he was crying.

"*Don't cry, Angel.*"

No, *he* wasn't crying. One of the voices was, or possibly a few of them. Their horror, guilt, and sadness overwhelmed him and fat tears dripped down his cheeks and into his collar.

Well, this was rather unfortunate.

"Hawks? What's wrong?" Eraserhead asked in the soothing tone Heroes used when consoling someone hysterical.

Hawks forced himself to swallow. He pushed Eraserhead away and stepped back, wings pressed protectively against his back. *It's nothing.*

"Hawks," Eraserhead said *gently.* Oh no. "You didn't speak."

Hawks repressed a flinch. "I said it's n-nothing, sir."

Eraserhead was unimpressed. "You started crying in the middle of the hall for seemingly no reason. I doubt it's because of 'nothing'."

"Oh, I'm just having a stressful week." Hawks choked, *making sure* he said each word aloud. "You know, with Eri. And other things. I know I'm making a *great* first impression right now." He dragged his hand across his eyes. "But I swear I'm not usually this affected by things."

"I believe you." Eraserhead said steadily.

Hearing those words activated Hawks's gag reflex and he swallowed a retch. "Yeah, yeah." he said with forced airiness. "Before you go all teacher-counselor on me, I have someone to talk to about things. So I'll be as cool as a cucumber by tomorrow."

"If you insist." Eraserhead said slowly.

Hawks was not sure the other Hero believed him this time. He hastily bid Eraserhead goodbye before he could dig himself into a deeper hole and walked away. Walked, not fled. He did not *flee*. Fleeing was not a thing he did. Nope.

Purple finally broke his silence. *"Hawks… I…"*

Shut up.

Hawks flinched as his body instinctively reacted with panic because *he'd responded again oh God—*

Purple sounded close to tears. *"I-I didn't use my Quirk—"*

Hawks could not find it in himself to be forgiving right now. *You didn't. But you* ***almost did.*** *Just like you took control of my body when I was* ***unconscious and couldn't say no****.*

That silenced them all.

Knowing Mockingjay would glare if he slept in the office again, Hawks went home to Miruko's empty apartment that night.

It was a good thing she wasn't there since he woke screaming three times.

How could he not, when his nightmares filled with memories that weren't his own, bloody goggles, writhing darkness, and flames that devoured his wings?

XXXXXXX

The day after the last day of internships, the world decided Hawks did not have enough problems to deal with.

He was still home alone, standing in the kitchen as he made breakfast and pretended not to notice the voices were aware of his thoughts and activities. It was not out of anger at their actions. Honestly, anger might be preferable to how Hawks's mind and body had decided to react.

Overwhelmed from yesterday's events and revelations, his mind had retreated into the safety of indifference. Terror and betrayal had faded into numb apathy, and he stumbled through his morning routine feeling less alive than a ghost. It was almost nice, because like this, it felt like nothing could affect him.

When his cell phone rang, he was instantly proven wrong as a single glance at the caller ID showed he could still feel panic.

The Hero Commission President was calling him.

Hawks smiled even though no one was around to see it. *Oh great. Guess I'm done playing ignorant.*

"*What do you mean?"* Green questioned timidly.

Hawks successfully did not flinch when he spoke. He decided now was not the time to freak out at him and shoved down his discomfort since they needed to know. *It's the Hero Commission President. I can't ignore her.*

"*You can too ignore her."* Orange growled. *"Put her on voicemail.* ***Forever****."*

Let me rephrase: I can't ignore her without her making my life more hellish. Hawks took a deep breath and exhaled. *Time to face the music.*

He answered the call. "Hello?" Maybe he could pretend he didn't know it was her—

"*You did not report in, Hawks."* the President greeted coolly, not fooled by his greeting. *"You know the standard procedure for missing agents."*

Report instantly to HQ and go through intense questioning to make sure you aren't brainwashed. Hope you aren't a sobbing or empty wreck when you come out. ***If*** *you come out.* Hawks's fingernails dug into his palm. "Sorry, ma'am. I've been busy."

"Not so busy you didn't have time to get food with Miruko along with other frivolous activities." she said coldly.

Hawks's mouth went dry. "I apologize for wasting money and time."

He heard her sniff. *"I have not called to lecture you about your laziness and dismissal of proper procedure."* She claimed even though she definitely did. *"Accounting wanted to inform you that your monthly payment has increased again due to the bills you missed."*

Hawks's legs felt weak. He slumped against the counter but forced his voice to remain steady. "I see. I'm not sure if I will have the money."

"If you miss the payment it will simply be added to next month's bill with interest." she said unsympathetically.

Hawks was not surprised. "Of course."

Her voice was cold. *"You will come to the office for a meeting on Wednesday."*

At least they're not dragging me out of bed in the middle of the night. He swallowed hard. "Yes, ma'am."

"Do not be late."

"I won't."

She hung up.

Hawks put his phone in his pocket and his head in his hands. *Remind me to make some carrot cake for Rumi if I ever have a second for 'frivolous activities'.*

"Why?" Green asked cautiously.

Because she's the only reason we have a roof over our heads. At this rate I won't be able to afford even the crappiest apartment. She's going to be stuck with us for a while. He smiled with only a hint of sadness. *I need to thank her somehow.*

*"Could you **stop** smiling and launch the entire Commission board into the sun instead?"* Yellow exploded.

The depth of his anger surprised Hawks. Usually Orange was the angry one.

Not now. Let me be grateful for what I have so I don't cry. Seriously, when I cry it isn't pretty.

Purple's presence shrank so much Hawks could hardly tell he was there anymore.

"How can the Commission do this to you?" Green demanded, denying Hawks his request.

Oh look, he was as angry as Yellow. *And* the rest of them. Great. Hawks would probably appreciate their rage more if not for yesterday's events.

Loopholes and legalities. Think of them as a weird private university. I learned my profession and now I have to pay them back.

"Universities do not enslave you for life." Silver criticized.

Hawks sighed. *Yeah.* His thoughts unwillingly turned to his upcoming death senten— meeting. *We need to prepare.*

"Will they interrogate you?" Red worried.

Definitely.

"What?!" Eight voices bellowed.

Hawks barely winced. *Why do you sound surprised? I'm a suspicious agent who went missing for a year. If you saw a picture in a book next to the phrase 'security risk' it'd be of me. Of course they're going to interrogate me. Don't worry. It's not like they're going to pull out the thumb screws right away. Not unless I make them think I'm a spy.*

"How are you so calm about this?" Red asked shakily.

Oh, you know. They could always do worse. Not that I know from experience. Plus I'm still hollowed out and numb from— Hawks forced himself not to think that. *Training and a healthy dose of denial helps. Heroes can't afford to crack if a villain captures them.*

Yellow took a couple deep, calming breaths. *"Okay. **Okay**. ...Who wants to go empty all the Commission's bank accounts? Let's create a villain-**ish** persona. Something like Robin Hood. Steal from the Commission, give to the people they screwed over."*

"Yellow!" Silver gasped, scandalized.

"Chill. That was a joke… kinda."

The voices bickered as usual, and Hawks could almost believe they did not notice how much quieter he was, or how he tensed if they became too loud. He wanted to pretend their admission didn't matter, but the fact that they used his body while he was drifting *terrified* him. And then Purple had almost forced him into silence using his Quirk.

But it was fine.

It was *fine*.

"You brought this upon yourself, my Angel. Remember we owe you."

"*Whoa. Anyone else feel dizzy?"* Yellow asked, voice wobbly.

"*What was that?"* Green demanded at the same time, though he sounded slightly nauseous.

Hawks blinked. *Huh? I didn't think anything. Everything is fine.*

He felt Green's confusion but he did not push him.

Hawks idly stirred his breakfast but his appetite was gone. *Maybe I should write everything down before we go in case something happens.*

*"**Nothing** will happen to you if I have any say about it."* Orange growled. *"You know what? Screw it! They try to hurt you, I'll take over and pretend to be some Villain possessing you and shit."*

A shiver went up Hawks's spine. *How would that help?*

"I'll have an excuse to kick their asses without you getting burned."

The shiver became ice-water. *That doesn't sound like the best plan. Let's try to think of something that **doesn't** end with us on the run, okay?*

Orange huffed.

An uncomfortable silence fell between them and Hawks knew its source. Ever since the voices revealed they had taken control of him while he drifted in order to prepare for their mission, it was as if the world had split, leaving a gaping abyss between them. The cracks had only widened after Purple had almost commanded him to remain silent about Endeavor. Hawks appreciated the distance, but he knew it was fragile. The world could shift again and the pieces could slam back together, causing more damage than ever before.

The tension built, almost worse than the painful pressure in his head that he used to feel every day.

He reached for his phone again. *I'm going to call Toshinori again. Could you shoo and go do whatever?*

"*Of course."* Green agreed quickly. *"Promise you won't share anything about the future?"*

"*Or Endeavor."* White added.

I... promise.

He knew they felt his reluctance but they did not confront him on it. He felt them retreat.

So are promises worth anything when you broke yours, albeit before you made it because I didn't think I'd need to make you promise ***not to use me behind my back?***

The voices were not around to hear the question.

Hawks shoved away his more bitter— Not scared. He was not scared. He was *fine*.— thoughts and pressed Toshinori's contact. He settled on the couch, his breakfast cooling and forgotten on the counter. Toshinori answered after two rings.

"*Good morning, Hawks."*

"Morning, Toshinori." Hawks plucked a feather from his wing— accepting the light sting of pain the physical removal caused— and fiddled with it. "Are you busy?"

He heard the sound of shuffling footsteps and the clink of a dish. *"I was about to head to work for a meeting but I have some time to talk."*

"Cool." Hawks brightened. "So I saw that *Space Saga* prequel you talked about."

"*What did you think?"* Toshinori asked eagerly.

"Well, the acting was awesome and the special effects were pretty good— I bet they had someone with a special effects Quirk on the team— but that twist with the clones made *zero* sense. When could the hero have been switched for his double? There was no time between them getting onto the ship and arriving at that desert planet unless the villains snagged him offscreen when they stopped somewhere to go to the restroom. They're in *space*. It's not like they could just kidnap him in the middle of nowhere— literally."

"*Obviously he was swapped for his clone during that hyperspace malfunction in the first half."* Toshinori countered. *"The villains must have teleported him out in exchange for his copy."*

Even though Toshinori could not see it, Hawks shot his phone a perplexed stare. "*How?* The villains never showed signs of having that tech before and the good guys were *in the middle of nowhere.* The galaxy was even called '*Nowhere*' since there weren't any planets nearby…"

They argued good-naturedly about the finer details of clones and teleportation plots until Hawks glanced at the time.

"Crap, I made you late."

"*It's perfectly fine. My boss won't mind. In fact he may encourage me to take more time off."*

Hawks smiled. "All Might must be a pretty cool boss."

Toshinori startled. *"Huh? Oh, yes. He is. Sorry, I sometimes forget I work for him."*

"How could you forget you work for *All Might*?" Hawks teased.

"*Very easily. He is quite forgettable."* Toshinori said solemnly and Hawks chuckled.

There was a pause that stretched just a bit too long.

"*Hawks…"* Uh oh. Toshinori's voice was serious. *"I do not mean to pry, but you sound upset. Is something bothering you?"*

Hawks's cheer faded. "Oh. You noticed? I... had a rough week." He laid a hand over his eyes. "One of my assignments involved an abused kid." *Two, if I count my intern— **Don't** think about it.*

"*Ah."* Toshinori said gravely. *"Those types of investigations are quite difficult to deal with."*

"Yeah." Hawks whispered. "The good news is that she's away from those bastards and there's no chance she's going back to them." *Meanwhile Shoto is stuck with Endeavor and I can't do a **damn thing**—*

Hawks yanked three more feathers out, ignorant to the small flecks of blood on their ends.

"*Good. I hope the ones that hurt her **rot**."* Toshinori said fiercely. He paused as if considering his next words carefully. *"But that is not all that is bothering you."*

Hawks wondered when he had gotten so obvious. He bit his lip. There was no way in hell he could talk about the Commission— he'd find himself vanished faster than he could say 'help'— but that was not the only thing that weighed heavily on his mind.

"…You promise you won't tell anyone anything I shared?"

"*Yes."* Toshinori confirmed.

"*No one* at all." Hawks emphasized. "Not even All Might."

A flash blond hair and puddles of blood invaded his mind and he repressed a shudder. *No no **no**. Not dealing with not-my-memories right now.*

"*I swear on my life this will remain between us except if I genuinely fear for your safety."*

"I…" *Have to go to a meeting with the Commission and they're going to hurt me.* "I..." *Had time travelers in my head take control of my body when I was unconscious.* "I-I..." *I also found out my idol is an asshole who abused his family— and still does.* "I..." *I can't tell him.* Hawks slumped in his chair and stared at the wall. "It's nothing."

"*I don't think that's true."* Toshinori said tactfully. *"But if you ever want to talk about it, I'll listen."*

Hawks hummed vaguely. "I'd better go. I need to get to work before they think I'm missing again."

"*That would be unfortunate."* Toshinori said quietly. He almost sounded sad.

Hawks bade him goodbye and hung up. He put his cold breakfast in the fridge and headed to work despite knowing he would regret not eating later. He was already late so he flew to work quicker than he usually would. The voices gave him space, leaving him alone with his thoughts for once. Was it because they could, or did they realiz— feel they had crossed a line and were unsure what to say to him?

They did cross a line. They used my body when I was drifting and didn't tell me—

Hawks halted in midair and hugged himself, rocking back and forth with flicks of his wings as he tried to physically hold himself together. He forced himself to drop that line of thought and moved on. There was no use being upset about it. They felt guilty, they apologized, it was done and over with.

He shouldn't be upset.

(Right?)

As the wind rushed through his hair and wings, Hawks went over his schedule for the day. Eri was still at that more adaptable facility to be monitored— Okay, *not* thinking about that either because when the nurse came in she asked Hawks to please *stop them before they drained all her blood.* He had loathed to leave her but he could not stay. He had promised to visit though. Eri had attached herself to him for some reason, and he was not about to let her face this alone.

Maybe he should have taken that chance to talk to Toshinori. He really wanted to scream at someone that the world was beyond *awful* sometimes.

Luckily, Hawks's interns were not on his overflowing list of 'need to watch over' right now. They would be okay for a couple months.

Green had kept his promise. He had told Hawks about future events… though he still refused to tell him how his future self died and other, personal details. Hawks would take what info he could get at this point.

According to Green, their class would merely be doing end of term tests in a few weeks by fighting their teachers next. There was little they could do regarding the blooming League of Villains unless they left an anonymous tip of their location. With Kurogiri, All For One, the Nomu, and the Doctor there, that was not wise.

They could not just go out and say "Hey, All For One is at this place. Could you send All Might to beat him up?" because that would just *scream* 'trap' and 'betrayal'. And if a Hero or group of Heroes went to investigate the site, they would likely be caught and the League and All For One would move, leaving them unaware of their new location. Not to mention they were not certain exactly when Dabi, Twice, Magne, Toga and the rest joined the League. The

Meta Liberation Army was a whole other can of worms, but Ennea might prove to be the answer to that problem.

It was the day *after* the exam that they had a brief opportunity to change things with less risk. That day in the previous timeline, Pink told him Tomura Shigaraki targeted Izuku Midoriya at the Kiyashi Ward Shopping Mall. That may be their best chance to get at least Shigaraki out of the picture.

The voices were a bit wary, however, going over plan after plan, possible outcome after possible outcome, because what would All For One do if his student was successfully arrested? Did All For One even know Shigaraki went to the mall? Would Shigaraki even be there? Were they good enough to arrest him in a public area with no casualties? At least this Shigaraki could not destroy a city like his future self apparently could.

Hawks repressed a shudder and wondered if he could convince Miruko to go to the mall with him on that day. Maybe he could claim he finally had enough money to buy some necessities? That should work…

He flew into his office and folded his wings, walking to his desk and the never-ending reports piled on it. Among them were files on the Shie Hassaikai. He wanted to check on Eri today and to do that, he needed to do this first.

He could not free himself from the Commission.

He could not help Shoto or stop Endeavor's abuse.

He could not stop the voices from controlling him for the good of the mission if they really wanted to.

But he could do this.

He could stop Overhaul.

He could help Eri.

Even if it felt like he could help no one else.

XXXXXXX

As the sun slowly set and his room filled with shadows, Shoto Todoroki reluctantly turned on a lamp to illuminate his room once more. That done, he turned back to his books, poring over rules and regulations for rescue operations. Aizawa had informed them of their upcoming finals in a couple months, and although Shoto could not predict whether rescue training would be part of this test since Class 1-A had not gotten the chance to learn much of it due to the League's attack, it could very well be a part of their exams.

Looking at the procedures, Shoto was confident in his abilities to perform the physical rescue. It was the other part of it that he doubted he could pull off. The books were useless when it came to comforting the civilians he would need to save. The statements were vague at best with 'be reassuring' and 'remain calm' or 'be in control' but it did not say *how*. The lack

of specifics frustrated him the more he looked for them so he eventually closed the book and shoved it aside, sighing heavily.

Shoto knew he was not the most socially-adept person. He was not a shining sun like Midoriya, All Might, or Hawks. His nature was too reserved and he could not exude an aura of approachable kindness like them. He had to learn how to act that way, or at least become an unshakable wall others could look to for protection. He could not freeze when a child cried, or be struck mute when they needed him to tell them things would be okay. But he did not know how and books were not helping.

Shoto knew Hawks' had offered to give him advice. Genuinely, as he was wont to do. But no matter how many times Shoto picked up his phone and prepared a text with questions, the messages always remained unsent. Shoto was not the most socially aware person, but he was aware of himself enough to know why he could not open communication with his mentor.

"*Maybe we abused kids are just good at recognizing each other…"*

Hawks's words would not leave Shoto's head. Logically, he knew Hawks must be talking about Eri in the "*we*" statement, and that Hawks was also talking about *himself*. "We", as in "Hawks and Eri". That was it. That had to be it. He tried not to consider it more because if Hawks had been abused and he recognized that Eri had been abused…

Then did he realize Shoto ~~was/being~~ had been as well?

It was training, Shoto reminded himself. He remembered Endeavor striking his mom when she tried to get him to stop. ...*Except when it wasn't.*

Shoto was not so blind to what was considered 'normal' that he failed to see his childhood was not 'normal' at all. Apparently Hawks's had not been as well. Had Hawks escaped his abusers? Had they been arrested? They must have. Hawks was a well-known Pro Hero now and none of the articles Shoto looked up mentioned any past of being an abuse victim.

Then again, no one seemed to even know Hawks's name for some reason. Could that be why? Had his father been the one to hurt him so they took Hawks from him and distanced him from his father's name? Was that anonymity for Hawks's protection or his father's?

It was not Shoto's business but it *mattered*.

Because if Shoto texted Hawks, his mentor would see it as an opening to keep corresponding with him. If Hawks knew about Endeavor— or suspected— he might try to help. Hawks was not like Midoriya, a student who had kept Endeavor's actions to himself. Hawks was a Pro Hero and Shoto had no doubt he would not let this stand. And if Hawks could not do it himself, he would trust someone to help in his stead. That was how Hawks worked.

Shoto almost wished he did not. He wished he could trust himself to simply text Hawks questions about socialization and comforting people. He wished that he could text his mentor without fear that he— Shoto, not Hawks— would end up telling him everything.

Shoto wanted to tell him. He wanted to reach for Hawks's outstretched hand and accept the offer of help he gave. But Hawks was not Midoriya. He would not keep Endeavor's actions to himself. And unlike Midoriya, he had the power to do something.

Shoto did not want that. At least, he *thought* so. He closed his eyes and pictured his mother's exhausted, frightened face, and suddenly he was not so certain.

But he knew it did not matter what he wanted. Things like this were meant to be kept private. Fuyumi did not complain, and even Natsuo— who could barely stand to be in the vicinity of their father— did not walk up to a Pro Hero and tell them the truth. They must be keeping silent for a reason, so Shoto would as well. That was why he told no one except Midoriya, who also kept it to himself instead of telling Eraserhead. If idealistic, heroic Midoriya did nothing, it must be the right thing to do.

If Shoto was not so sure about that, he kept it buried deep down and did not acknowledge it.

The room to his door opened and he distractedly glanced up, still caught in his thoughts. "I'm still fine, Fuyu—"

His jaw clicked shut. It was not his sister there, but Endeavor. His father stood in the doorway, filling it with his presence as the light from the hallway cast his shadow across the floor. His eyes narrowed.

Shoto hid a grimace and stood. "Father, you're home early."

Endeavor said nothing as a greeting and stepped into Shoto's room. His gaze flicked to the books on Shoto's desk. "What is this?"

"I've been studying for our finals." Shoto explained. "Rescue operations may— will be a part of them."

Endeavor's disapproving expression remained. "Hmm. Always remember to be efficient. You have no time to waste on a hysterical woman when there is a crisis."

Well, if seeing me is enough to calm her down and make her feel safe, I won't have to say a word, Shoto thought. "Yes sir."

"We will be training your fire side today as we should have this week." Endeavor's lip curled. "I hope you've learned your lesson about wasting time. You're even further behind on your training than your peers since that flighty imbecile hasn't taught you anything of value."

You don't know what Hawks taught me. You didn't even bother to ask.

Again, Shoto kept his thoughts to himself. He followed Endeavor down the hall to the training dojo. A door to their left opened and Fuyumi paused in the doorway. Her gaze flicked from Endeavor to Shoto and she smiled. Shoto could recognize the brittle, hopeful edge to it.

"Dad, you're home. We already had dinner but I can—"

Endeavor brushed past her like she wasn't there. Fuyumi glanced back at him but quickly turned away and smiled at Shoto. He wished it did not look so tired.

"I'll make you something for afterward." she promised.

Shoto hoped he would feel like eating once he was done training, if only so Fuyumi would not be upset. It had been a while since his father was rough enough to make him vomit, but he looked particularly annoyed today.

"Thanks Fuyumi." he murmured and followed Endeavor into the training room.

The door slid shut behind them.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not 100% sure if the "Erasure doesn't affect fully-covered targets" thing is canon or not (it said it is on the wiki but... it's the wiki, and it's not always right) but I'm going with it. *shrugs*

Dig Your Grave and Lie In It

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hawks's body shook like a leaf in a violent storm as he curled up on the wooden floor, barely avoiding a pile of his own vomit. He could hardly see through the tears blurring his vision, which dripped down his face and onto his burning tongue, mixing salt with acid. He felt a hand on his shoulder as someone knelt beside him, telling his attacker to stop as he was only five.

He heard heavy footsteps and looked up at Endeavor, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Daddy—"

His vision filled with orange flames a the house around him burned. His mother smiled sadly at him, tears in her eyes as but no matter how desperately he screamed she did not run, resigning herself to her fate. Flickers of blue appeared amid the inferno, growing larger and larger, and the two colors of fire fought to see which could devour her first—

For once, Hawks did not wake screaming. It was a good thing since Miruko was home tonight. The voices were notably absent and Hawks wondered how much they had seen. He felt no more than the faintest flickers of horror and realized their walls were holding. Or were some of them still asleep? Did they sleep? What did they do when he was asleep other than take control of his body? Hawks tried not to think about it, but his alternate options were not much better.

Although he was essentially alone in his head, Hawks did not cry. He did not cry for the Shoto in that memory, or the Shoto of the future, or the Shoto of now. He did not cry for himself either.

Crying was pointless.

Hawks's chest and back ached, just below his collar bone through to his shoulder blade. The scars there were aching again.

He got up and carefully opened the closet that held his stuff, making sure the hinges did not squeak. He shoved some boxes aside and riffled through the one holding the few Hero memorabilia he owned. At the bottom of the box, wrapped carefully by Rumi who knew what it meant to him, was his old Endeavor plushie.

He had gotten it when he was five as both a Christmas and birthday present. Well, back then he had *assumed* it was for both his birthday and Christmas. Nowadays he doubted his parents even knew— or cared— his birthday was on the twenty-eighth of December. They never got him presents before that as far as he remembered. Nowadays, he knew he had been an accident baby, and if one of his mother's drunken rants was any indication, he only had the

chance to be born because his parents had assumed a baby cost less than an illegal operation late in the third trimester.

He never found out why they kept him for as long as they did. Were they just waiting for someone to come by and offer some cash for him? Hawks did not think they were cruel enough to give him to Quirk Traffickers, but there were few other ways for a useless child that required money, food, and clothes to earn them some quick yen. No wonder they had given him up so readily when the Commission came for him.

Years later, Hawks still remembered his excitement that he got a gift this year like other kids, and his elation when he saw it was a Hero toy. Hero toys were too expensive when there was booze to buy, so he'd been overjoyed. The toy made little *fwoosh* noises like flames, but its voice box had broken long ago, even though Hawks barely used it because even that soft sound was too loud when his parents were hungover.

The Endeavor plushie had been with him when his parents screamed at each other. It was with him when they screamed at him, and grabbed him by the arm to throw him out of the room, and threw empty bottles by his head. It was with him when they gave him to the Commission in exchange for 'financial security', as in more money for booze while also ensuring they would never have to work another day of their lives... not that he remembered them working before. It was with him when he was taken to the Commission's training facility.

Its left arm still had red string attaching it to its body from when he'd tried to cling to it, pleading hysterically as one of his handlers tried to take it away. The arm had ripped off and the agents had grown sick of trying to deal with a bawling child so one of them sewed it back on. He was allowed to keep it, but not play with it. Heroes did not 'play' Hero.
They *were* Heroes, and they had no time for childish games.

He was *six*. One year older than Shoto Todoroki had been in that flashback. He could still feel the pain in his throat from spitting up bile. He could still feel Endeavor's burning hand around his thin wrist. He could still feel his mother's arm on his back—

***Shoto's** mother. Mine never cared.*

*Those **aren't** my memories.*

But some aspects were disturbingly close.

He spent the next few hours staring at the Endeavor plushie until he could not bear to see it anymore.

Miruko caught him putting items in a box at four thirty in the morning. She leaned against the wall next to the closet and watched him, arms crossed over her chest.

"What are you up to?"

"I'm getting rid of some stuff." Hawks said as he quickly re-rolled a poster before she could see it. "I think I might donate it." *Or burn it.*

Miruko plucked the poster out of his hands and unrolled it. Her pale eyebrows quirked upward. "This is your signed Endeavor poster. It was one of the few times Endeavor actually *did* signings. You skipped a meeting at Commission HQ to get this autograph. The President was pissed. They kept you for a week after."

"I recall." Hawks said tersely.

He busied himself with going through another box but he could feel Miruko's eyes on his back.

"You shouldn't throw this out." she said too quietly. "This is worth money. You should sell it online."

Hawks's stomach churned with disgust. "I don't want to make money off of that."

"*You can."* White said. Hawks barely repressed a flinch at his voice. *"We know you need it."*

Having his permission did not make Hawks feel any better.

"Then I'll sell it for you and give you the cash." Miruko decided. "You need it."

Hawks almost laughed as she unknowingly echoed White. Almost, but not quite. He shrugged listlessly. "Sure. Whatever."

Miruko set the signed poster aside. She grasped his wrist and gently yanked him away from the boxes, back to the couch, and made him sit. She settled down beside him and locked eyes with him.

"Talk to me, Baby Bird."

"About what? You'll have to be more specific. So many things have happened in my lifelong tale of woe." His voice came out less jokey and more exhausted than he intended.

"How about we start with why you're getting rid of all your Endeavor merch? You saved up forever for it."

"I can't look at it anymore." Hawks said honestly.

Red eyes studied him solemnly. "Why?"

Hawks hesitated and, despite his misgivings, turned inward. ***Please*** *let me tell her.*

"*You can't."* Green rejected.

Why not? This is Rumi. She can be hotheaded but she won't go running to Endeavor and kick him in the face. She knows how to deal with things like this. She knows this situation would be delicate. He wrapped his arms around himself and squeezed. *I understand that you're afraid we won't be believed, but nothing will change for younger Shoto if we don't* ***try****—*

"*Tell her."*

Hawks nearly jumped. *Huh?*

White took a shaky breath, his unease like icy sludge in Hawks's veins. *"Tell her about Endeavor. Don't tell her you know, but tell her you suspect."*

Hawks did not expect to get permission. Based on White's own shock, he did not expect to give it. But he did not go back on his word, instead hovering at the edge of Hawks's consciousness, just enough to listen in but close enough to their 'home' that he could retreat if needed.

Hawks swallowed a few times, exhaling as he made sure he spoke aloud.

"I think Endeavor is abusive."

Miruko stared at him. For every second that passed in heavy silence, Hawks's heart beat faster until he was sure it would burst. Then her head sank into her hands and she breathed out, slowly.

"That is a bold claim, Hawks."

White fled faster than a man faced with a flow of lava.

Hawks's wings pressed against his back as his shoulders slumped. "I knew you would not believe me. Hell, *I* hardly believe me—"

"I *believe* you." Miruko clarified. "I just don't know what the hell to do. What the *fuck*."

"Language." Hawks mumbled.

"You've heard worse." Miruko scoffed. Her ears drooped. "How long have you suspected this?"

"If I'm being honest with myself, since Endeavor tried to force me to rescind Shoto's internship offer." Hawks admitted. "I tried to play it off as him wanting to spend time with his kid but he was too violent for that, you know?"

Miruko's lips pressed thin. "Did Shoto ever find out he burned you?"

"No, thankfully. The kid would probably blame himself." Hawks slumped against the back of the couch and stared at the ceiling so he would not have to see the box of flame-colored memorabilia. "You know as well as I do that this will be dismissed as easily as that complaint you made me submit unless we have undeniable proof. For that, a Todoroki would have to approach us with this. And… I'm not even sure we *should* try to come forward. Endeavor is the Number Two Hero. Many people won't admit it, but they look up to him. If it's revealed he's an abuser, faith in Heroes will be shaken. Especially with Stain's claims so fresh in everyone's minds…"

"If Hero Society can utterly collapse because one Hero is abusive, I'm not sure it deserves to keep standing." Miruko growled.

"Guess we'll have to hold it together then." Hawks replied steadily. "Since you know if it goes, too many people will get hurt."

"So what do you want to do?" Miruko asked.

Hawks's eyes burned. He wiped at them hastily. *White?*

"*She believes us."* White croaked, more emotional than Hawks had ever heard him. *"Just like that. This whole time I could have—"*

"*She only believed us because of other circumstance."* Orange interjected ruthlessly. Hawks recoiled as his rage brushed against him. *"Don't go rethinking how you could've acted differently in our past. We can't change our own history, but for them things are going differently. Accept it."*

Hawks blinked and Miruko was still there, albeit on her phone. She looked up at him when he stirred. "Only two minutes this time."

"I'm getting better." Hawks joked weakly. His palms were sweaty. Miruko had been there and it had only been a couple of minutes so nothing had to have happened, right? It was just normal drifting.

He hated to acknowledge that drifting was the preferred normal now.

"Hmm." She leaned back. "You didn't answer my question."

"I don't know what I want to do yet." Hawks admitted slowly. "I think I'd like to talk to Shoto first, but I can't just call him out of the blue and drop this on him. If he calls me, I might ease into it. Until then… I don't know how to proceed. I can't walk up to Endeavor's house and arrest him. We still have no real evidence, and probably no way to get some."

"*You could talk to Rei Todoroki."* Red mentioned.

"*I'm not sure that's a good idea."* White rejected instantly.

Hawks decided to trust his judgment. He was her son, after all. And she was in a mental institution… where Endeavor had stuck her. After pushing her so much she poured boiling water on her son—

The area around Hawks's left eye prickled. He fiercely rubbed at it.

"*But if Miruko digs around more she may want to interview Rei because of the whole Quirk Marriage thing."* Yellow protested. *"I mean, didn't Endeavor use his power and influence to force her parents to agree to his marriage proposal? Miruko might find that out."*

Hawks hoped Miruko didn't see his skin drain of color. *Her parents **sold her**?*

"*Wha—? Oh. **Oh shi**— No!"* Yellow babbled. He paused, and Hawks wished he couldn't feel the other's disgusted unease. *"I mean, kinda? Maybe yes? I mean I don't really know the details… White? You want to share…?"*

"*Not like you, Gold. Mom still had contact with them."* was all White said.

It did not give many details but if Rei still talked to her parents then that had to mean they had some type of good relationship with the daughter they had given away, right? Hawks breathed a little easier. He heard Yellow whisper an apology to White for blabbing, and White's soft murmur that it was fine. Then Hawks remembered Rei Todoroki still ended up trapped with Endeavor and his naive relief drained away.

How the hell did no one realize something was wrong sooner?

"Hey." Miruko was in his face again. And her worried look was back. Fan-freaking-tastic. "You're zoning a lot again. I think you need a break to relax and unwind."

"I don't get breaks." Hawks reminded her.

"You will. I'll make sure of it." she growled, and he knew it was more than an idle threat. She brightened and all of her former bloodlust vanished like smoke. "So what do you want to do?"

"I don't have a say on whether I want to 'do' anything, do I?" Hawks asked dryly. "What if I just wanted to stay home?"

She poked him in the side of the head. "Nope. That's not happening cause you'll just do more work and stress yourself out. Then I'll be sitting outside the bathroom hoping you don't pass out from hyperventilating. You can't be a workaholic all the time. You need to learn how to take a break. So we are going to have a fun day this week. We could go to a bar, or clubbing, or—"

"I'm *not* going drinking." Hawks interrupted adamantly. "If I start I won't stop."

Miruko did not know his parents were alcoholics but she probably suspected by now if she realized he abstained from alcohol out of more than just preference. "Regardless, all work no play is going to make you waste away. Or lead to a mental breakdown."

Hawks winced but did not deny it.

"We'll go see a movie or something." Miruko decided. "Or just have a nice day outside. Whatever will get you to take a break. I'll even invite Jeanist back. Is there anyone you want to bring?"

Hawks hesitated. The only people he could really call his friends were Miruko, Mockingjay, and Toshinori. Mockinjay would refuse simply because she was not about to lose her ambiguity for an outing, and inviting Toshinori felt wrong when Hawks had yet to meet the man face to face. He wracked his brain for a bit.

"Maybe… Tensei?"

Silver's surprise— and joy— made him feel less desperate and more confident in his decision.

Miruko clapped him on the back. "That's the spirit. We'll make you a friend group yet!"

Hawks remembered something related to this conversation, because even when planning to have fun, work *always* intervened. "We should go to the mall too once I have some money to spend."

"Great." Miruko's jaw stretched in a yawn, her teeth almost glowing in the shadowy room. "Now let's go back to sleep for a couple more hours. You can decide what to do with that stuff in the morning."

Hawks bade her goodnight— technically good morning— and crawled under his blankets. In the darkness, he could see the Endeavor plushie was sitting on top of the box. He stood up and shoved it under a shirt before returning to the couch.

White, did you ever forgive Endeavor?

White was silent a long time. Not out of guilt, or discomfort, but because he was unsure Hawks was ready to hear what he said. Eventually, he said it anyway.

"*No. I could see he regretted it and wanted to change, but I never forgave him for what he did to me, Tou— my siblings, mom, and our family. I could work with him as a Hero… but never as father and son.* ***Never****."*

There was no anger in White's voice, only the cool stiffness of someone who accepted their feelings long ago.

Hawks did not return to sleep.

XXXXXXX

A new day brought a new host of crimes to be thwarted. Hawks was as quick and efficient as ever but he could feel his sleepless and nightmare-filled nights catching up to him. Only the keenest-eyed fans— and maybe some overzealous reporters— would be able to tell he was just a tad slower than normal.

That slowness, as minuscule as it was, gave Hawks anxiety he hardly felt ever since Miruko helped him realize he would not be locked in a room or punished for being less than perfect all the time. It did not help he was already so jittery, his every nerve prickling or on fire as his body failed to deal with the stress.

So when he was faced with a rampaging Villain, he could only stand there and stare for a second as he wondered if the world had it out for him this week. Said rampaging Villain could apparently turn strong emotions into attacks, and boy did they have a lot of pent-up feelings, as they let the world know. They had the sense to cover themselves up with clothing, hiding their gender and appearance with a thick coat, mask and hood. The mask was a cheap plastic mold depicting a crying face that could have been bought at any costume store.

All Hawks could see of the person behind it were their wild, glowing acid-green eyes.

For some reason, those eyes unsettled him but he did not allow himself to acknowledge that unease.

"I am *Heartbreak!*" they screamed. "If I can't be happy, *no one can!*"

"*Oh good. They named themself."* Purple sighed.

The self-dubbed 'Heartbreak' threw a ball of blue light at a young man with ram horns on his head. He immediately crumpled to the street, shoulders shaking with violent sobs. The man next to him was hit by green light and he curled his lip before leaving the other there with a disgusted huff.

"He manipulated me!" Heartbreak ranted. "He *used* my Quirk to get high! Like I was a *drug*."

Hawks's stomach twisted into knots.

"*Looks like someone's on the drama juice."* Orange sneered.

"*Be more empathetic."* Pink chided.

"He never loved me, just my *Quirk*. I was going to *marry* that *MANIPULATIVE SON OF A BITCH!*" Green eyes locked onto Hawks, finally noticing he was there. A gloved hand pointed at him. "*You* know!" the villain shrieked. "You know how it feels to be betrayed in body, soul, and heart!"

"*Oh dear."* Red said faintly.

"*I think we're dealing with an empath—"* Green surmised.

"*No shit, genius."* Orange and his cursing were ignored.

"*—Who's currently screaming about Hawks being betrayed."* Pink finished for Green, voice small.

"You never cried, did you?!" the villain screamed at Hawks. "You never cried when they used your body for themselves? *Did you?! I* never cried either even though I never wanted to use my Quirk like that. *Never!* But I thought it was worth it. I thought I was making him *HAPPY!*"

There was a moment of stunned silence from the voices.

"*…The news channels are going to have a field day."* Purple said flatly.

Red, green, and blue lights exploded from Heartbreak's body, whipping around them like angry miniature suns. Hawks avoided the orbs and intercepted a few with his feathers before they could reach fleeing civilians. To his relief, they did not affect him by coming into contact with his wings. Or he was already such an emotional mess that their presence did not make a difference…

Hawks shoved those thoughts away and tackled Heartbreak. Two long feathers looped around their wrists, wrenching their arms behind their back, and the Quirk-suppressing cuffs went on right after. The orbs instantly disintegrated into nothingness. The man with the ram horns stopped sobbing, and the artificially-disgusted man that had been with him rushed back to his side.

Heartbreak screamed in anguish, but soon stopped thrashing and went limp as the fight drained out of them. Hawks could hear the person behind the mask sobbing.

"I thought I wouldn't be used like that again." they hiccuped. "I thought he was *different*. It hurts so *much*…"

Hawks gently lifted them onto their feet. "I understand." he said lowly as the police approached. "And I'm sorry. When you talk with your lawyer, ask about opening a case for Quirk Abuse. He doesn't have to get away with what he's done."

Heartbreak looked at him, eyes faded from acid green to a miserable blue. Hawks hid a sigh of relief. "Does the hurt go away?" Heartbreak sniffled. "Does it get better?"

Hawks averted his gaze. "I'm… still finding out."

Hawks did not try to unmask them and shot a warning look at the policemen who arrested them to ensure they did the same. They may be a villain in society's eyes, but exposing their identity like this would be needlessly cruel. Heartbreak could be unmasked in private. His job done, Hawks flared open his wings, prepared to take to the sky once more.

"Hawks! Hawks, a question?"

Hawks turned. A blue-skinned woman with pale lilac hair was hurrying towards him—

The voices' panic lashed at him like whips of flame before they retreated.

"*Oh shit."* Yellow breathed.*"That's **Curious**."*

"*Curious: Real name 'Chitose Kizuki'."* Green explained rapidly. *"She's a member of the Meta Liberation Army and the executive director of Shoowaysha Publishing. Her Quirk allows her to make anything she touches explosive. And she probably has a camera on her and is recording you. Be wary."*

It was a good thing Hawks was so adept at keeping a cool expression. *You have **got** to be kidding me. Does one of you secretly have a bad luck Quirk or what?*

Curious stopped in front of him, dark eyes alight and a wide grin on her face that he might have mistaken for awed if he did not know better.

She did not stare at him like a fan admiring a Hero.

She stared at him like a serial arsonist admired fire.

"Chitose Kizuki, Shoowaysha Publishing." she introduced herself. "I'm technically not a journalist anymore but oh, I *couldn't* let this opportunity pass! Do you have time to answer a few questions?"

"*Don't let her touch you."* Green warned.

Hawks kept a polite amount of distance between himself and the reporter. He was not concerned about showing his unease. He had practice with this kind of thing. He knew his smile was natural and flawless even as he considered just flying for it. But doing that may be the worst possible thing he could do other than give a 'No comment.'

"I have a minute or less." he said casually. "There's always more crimes to stop, you know."

"Of course." she fawned with a journalist's practiced sweetness. "Could you tell us anything about your disappearance?"

Naturally *that* was her first question. "It's still under investigation, so I'm afraid not."

"Then would you like to clarify what Heartbreak meant when they stated you yourself have been used?"

Hawks kept his expression light. "Heartbreak might have been projecting a bit because I honestly can't think of what they could be referring to. As my fans know, I've never had a romantic partner."

He grinned and winked, as if hinting that it was possible one of his admirers just *might* be able to fill that role even though he knew they never would. Heroes that were not in an established relationship— as in either married or openly together with another person who might just be another Hero— were expected to keep themselves as a dream option for their fans to fantasize about being with. The public ate that kind of thing up, and it tended to cause chaos when eligible bachelors and bachelorettes became unavailable. Unless there was a tantalizing mystery to solve on who their secret partner was, of course.

As far as Hawks was concerned, he would never have a secret or public partner, and not just because he was usually so busy. Dating just was not his thing.

"*There's a couple words for that."* Green murmured.

Hawks repressed a flinch. *Let me guess: 'Wrong', 'immature', and 'prudish'?*

"*What?!*" Green spluttered. *"No—"*

"*I'm sorry but this is not the time for this conversation."* Silver interjected quickly.

"Any more questions, madame?" Hawks asked smoothly as if he had not just had a short conversation in his head.

Curious looked torn. "Unfortunately, I was on my way to a meeting—" *With the Meta Liberation Army?* Hawks thought. "—so I must cut this short. Here's my card." She handed him a business card. "I would *die* for an interview with you."

"Please don't." Hawks joked, though he had the feeling she wasn't.

"*Please do."*

"***Orange**!"*

"*What? We all know she's trouble."*

Hawks pretended to put the card in his pocket but secretly kept it in his gloved hand instead. He did not know the exact way Curious's Quirk worked so he erred on the side of caution. He would copy the information to a new slip of paper and burn the card and glove. He had spare pairs for his costume, and he would rather be paranoid than blindsided by a random explosion.

"Have a nice day, Kizuki-san." he bade farewell cordially.

Hawks took to the air and flew off. He glanced at the time and decided it was late enough that he could get away with going home and maybe getting a couple more hours' sleep for once.

"*Wait."* Green ordered. *"Don't go home yet."*

Hawks stopped and landed on a random rooftop.

"*Check your wings for bugs and trackers."* Green warned. *"She might have planted some on you."*

That's ille— Oh, right. She wouldn't care.

"*I could take control for a tick and fry them all."* Yellow offered hopefully.

Hawks's skin crawled but he forced himself to think logically. *Okay. Try not to knock us out.*

It was still disturbing as hell to be pushed out of control of his own body.

And it *was* pushed.

In his eagerness to finally be let out, Yellow shoved Hawks aside, leaving him feeling as if he had been shoved in the back into an abyss. Yellow did not appear to notice Hawks's jarring exit as he flexed Hawks's body's fingers, watching them curl and uncurl in fascination.

"*Yellow? The bugs?"* Green asked. To Hawks, his voice sounded like it was coming through a long tunnel.

"*Be careful."* Silver cautioned.

Yellow nodded and activated his Quirk. It went much better than last time. The electricity he summoned was little more than a powerful static shock. That done, Hawks waited patiently for him to give control back.

Yellow didn't. He continued to stare at his hands, and move his arms and legs. He blinked and grabbed Hawks's golden hair, pulling a lock in front of his face.

Hawks swallowed dryly. *Yellow? Can I have control back?*

"*I don't want to."*

The thought came much clearer than Green's words. Hawks could not tell if the others heard it or not. If they did, they did not object.

If Hawks currently had a heartbeat, it would have quickened. *I-I get that. I do. I know it sucks to be stuck in my head all the time. But please, I—*

"*Why **can't** we use your body some times?"* Yellow asked. Did he mean to say that to Hawks? *"Like, just to walk around, and eat, and feel the warmth of the sun?"*

Yellow, *it's **my** body,* Hawks thought, and was surprised it came out calm.

"*So?"* Yellow demanded. Hawks's body's features twisted into a scowl. *"At least let us out **sometimes**. You don't use it when you drift so what's wrong with us using it when you're not, huh?"*

This time, Hawks could not repress his fear. *Yellow, **please**.*

Hawks's consciousness *jerked* and he was in control again. He staggered and sat heavily on the concrete top of the building, chest heaving.

"*I'm sorry."* Yellow whispered. His guilt lashed at Hawks like a cold whip.*"I— I didn't mean that. Any of it. I swear. I'd never take control when you don't want me to. I promised. I just miss having a body."*

Hawks forced himself to breathe evenly as his heart threatened to burst out of his chest. *I know. I just wish you didn't have to use mine.*

He stood up and took to the air once more.

His hands were shaking again. To distract himself, he thought back to their interrupted conversation.

So what was that you were talking about earlier, Green?

"*Huh? Oh, right! I think you might be an aromantic asexual, or 'aroace'. It means you don't experience romantic or sexual attraction."*

Hawks bit his lip. He thought he might have heard those terms before in passing, but he could not remember the context. *Isn't that bad? Is something wrong with me?*

"***No**."* Green said sharply. *"Being aromantic and asexual does **not** mean you don't feel love. It just means you don't have the desire to do romance things."*

"*Or 'weird tango stuff'."* Yellow added, though his tone was less teasing this time and more guilty.

Hawks guessed he still felt bad about the whole keeping-control thing that he was *not* going to think about.

Oh, he thought faintly. *Cool, I guess. That it's a thing, I mean. It's a thing?*

"*It is."* Silver confirmed.

Huh, Hawks thought vaguely. It felt like his head was filled with cotton as his brain failed to process this information. *Hopefully the Commission won't ever try to make me pass on my Quirk then.*

He meant it as a joke— mostly— and was stunned by the wave of protectiveness that washed over him.

"*If they try I'm floating them into the sun."* Pink growled. *"**Literally**."*

"*That's overkill."* Red chided. *"A cannonball to the face would be much more efficient."*

"*Not if I get to them first."* White said lowly.

Hawks was once again reminded of White— Shoto's— backstory and his stomach twisted in on itself. He shoved his negative feelings and misgivings away, focusing on the now, and forced a smile.

Thanks for having my back.

XXXXXXX

The box of Endeavor stuff was still in the apartment when Hawks woke on Monday morning. He gave it a wide berth as he walked past it to the fridge where a sticky note from Miruko was waiting for him on the jug of milk.

'*I got Ingenium's number. Call him to meet up on Friday.'*

Hawks stared at the number written below the note and his stomach dropped.

In an instant, all his lingering unease about the voices was overwhelmed by pure, unadulterated panic.

What do I do?

"*You… call him?"* Red asked questioningly.

Even with their connection, she failed to comprehend the depth of the throat-tightening, hand-trembling, breath-stuttering anxiety that gripped him. *I know but what do I **say**? What does one say to a potential maybe-friend? I can't just call him out of nowhere and go 'wanna hang out'!*

"*That's what you usually do in these friendship situations."* Purple mentioned.

"*You're one to talk, Mister 'I'm Not Here To Make Friends'."* Yellow muttered.

"*...You're never going to let that go, are you?"*

"*Never, **friend**."* Who knew the word 'friend' could be said with such fiercely determined aggression?

Hawks reluctantly brought the topic back to Ingenium. *But we're not friends yet. We're acquaintances. I don't know if he even tolerates me.*

"*He faced a throng of ravenous reporters for you."* Pink reminded him.

That could have been out of a sense of heroic duty.

"*I think you're overthinking this."* Green mumbled. *"And that's coming from **me**."*

"*How the hell did you become friends with Miruko and Mockingjay if **this** is how you react?"* Orange demanded.

*My friendship with Miruko and Mockingjay just **happened.*** Hawks grasped some feathers but merely clung to them rather than pull them out. *I don't know what I did. I don't know what I'm **doing**.*

"*Who knew the sociable Hawks was secretly such a nervous wreck?"* Yellow marveled. *"You're perfectly fine at work."*

*But that's **work**. This is… **this**. I don't want to mess it up.*

And that was the crux of his issue. He never really *reached out* with the intent of becoming friends with someone before. For Miruko, things just fell into place. For Mockingjay, he had been able to hide behind Hero work as an excuse to try to get close. Toshinori was still just a voice on the phone. But here, Hawks could not help but feel like every word out of his mouth would be wrong. Would Ingenium even want to hear from him after he nearly lost his brother in Hosu? He had seemed polite enough but what if that was out of professionalism?

"*Tensei doesn't blame you."* Silver reassured him. *"He is one of the kindest men I have ever met. And he knows that was not your fault."*

"*So stop being paranoid and call him."* Orange commanded, less nicely.

Hawks put the number into his contact list and called it. He bounced in place as it rang.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice.

Maybe he won't pick—

Click.

"*Hello?"*

"Hi, Tensei!" Hawks said brightly. Thankfully, his voice did not squeak. He cleared his throat. "It's Hawks. You got a sec to talk about not-Hero-work things?"

Real casual, Hawks. Truly, you are the embodiment of socialization that everyone believes you to be when it comes to making friends in a not-awkward way.

Red chuckled. *"This is too adorable! You almost sound like a fanboy— Um, that was horribly rude. My apologies. But it's just like— Oh my* ***God****."* She stopped laughing, voice low with horror. *"Everyone, I think Green is infl—"*

"*Of course I have time."* Ingenium said, distracting Hawks. *"What do you need?"*

"Nothing big. I just wanted to thank you for distracting the reporters." Hawks began. "I think I forgot to before Hosu."

"*You're welcome."*

"Would you like to meet up and see a movie on Friday with Miruko, Jeanist, and I?" Hawks blurted. "That was the other thing. I almost forgot, haha." *Geez, I'm being awkward. Or is it all in my head? It's not like me to overthink conversations like this...*

"*What movie would you like to see?"* Ingenium asked.

That wasn't a 'no', which made Hawks feel just a bit less foolish. "Well I've already seen *Space Saga*— which I highly recommend by the way— so do you have any ideas?"

Ingenium mumbled something.

"What was that?"

"*I said…* ***Solar Fighting Robot 6****."* Tensei muttered, a hint of embarrassment in his voice. *"I've always loved those movies ever since I was a kid."*

Hawks honestly did not expect that answer. His own nerves drained away and he grinned. "I think I've seen a couple of those." He checked the listings of movies available at the theaters and whistled. "Wow, those space movies sure are popular lately."

"*This one is a gritty reboot so I don't know how good it will be."*

"*Ooo*, fun." Hawks said gleefully. "I don't know about Jeanist but Miruko will love it as long as it has explosions and space battles."

"*I can believe that."* Tensei chuckled.

Hawks twirled a feather between his fingers. "We'll probably go to dinner someplace after. If we don't get mobbed by the press, that is."

"*Hopefully we can avoid them for one night."* Tensei agreed. *"Perhaps we should wear disguises?"*

Hawks wondered how he did not think of that. "That's a great idea! I'll pass it on to Miruko. So I guess I'll see you Friday if I'm not dead by then." It was only half a joke since he had the meeting with Commission on Wednesday. "Er, that was a joke by the way. I'm not going to be murdered, I swear."

"*I hope not."* Tensei said, bemused. *"See you Friday."*

Hawks bade his goodbyes, grabbed a pillow, and screamed into it. *How bad was that?*

"*Trust me when I say it wasn't."* Green reassured him.

"*You did a good job."* Pink encouraged.

Don't patronize me, Hawks thought stiffly.

Despite the casualness of their banter, they all tiptoed around the huge rift that lingered between them. Hawks should address the elephant in the room— or would 'people in his body' be a more appropriate phrase?— but could not bring himself to.

It had been a few days so he should be over it, right? Even though Yellow had briefly refused to give control back just *yesterday*…

Hawks shoved his encroaching fear into a corner and hoped the voices did not notice it. He glanced at the clock. *I'm going to call Toshinori before I go in to work.*

"*I still can't believe you're phone-buddies with Toshinori Yagi. How did this happen?"* Yellow asked rhetorically.

"*One day All Might gave Gold his secretary's number—"* White began.

"*I know **that**. But how—"*

"*Yellow."* Green interrupted. *"This is normally the time that we go shoo."*

Yellow pouted. *"I'm shoo-ing."*

They retreated out of Hawks's conscious mind. Not for the first time, he wondered where they went and what it looked like in their part of his head. He did not know since he was simply shoved aside like an unwanted doll when they took control—

Breathe.

Hawks called Toshinori, who picked up with two rings. "Hello! So guess what horrible, awful, no-good news I found out?"

"*Should I be worried?"* Toshinori asked, bemused.

"Maybe." Hawks grinned wickedly. "They're making another *Space Saga* prequel. It's a prequel to the prequel."

"*Oh **no**..."* Toshinori groaned. *"They've already announced it? But the last one barely left theaters..."*

"The people want more, and they will get it." Hawks proclaimed dramatically. "Money must be made."

He wondered what the voices would think if they heard Toshinori Yagi make such a horrified whining sound. He insisted on looking up all the information they had so far about the cast and crew as they fired dream directors and actors back and forth to each other.

As they talked, Hawks idly browsed the internet as well. His fight with Heartbreak only got a small article. Thank goodness. Unfortunately, his curiosity got the best of him. He broke the rule of not looking himself up on the internet and groaned.

The forums were filled with speculation on who broke his heart, the expected theories on whether he was related to (insert Hero or Villain of the week here), along with forum posters wanting to find the heart-breaking culprit and "stab them for hurting my sexy thotty husbando so Hawks will love me instead". In those exact words.

"Yikes." he breathed. *The internet is a scary place*

"*Agreed. It can be quite frightening. What have you seen?"* Toshinori asked and Hawks realized he had said his opinion on the internet out loud. *"Do I need to get the— oh, what is the phrase?— 'brain bleach'?"*

Hawks yanked out a feather and fiddled with it. "That's not necessary yet. I just saw an article theorizing about my latest battle with an empathic villain, Heartbreak."

"*Ah, I read about that one. The public has certainly dug their claws into it. They love the mystery."*

Hawks slouched in his chair. "I have no clue how some Heroes like Edgeshot can stand being mysterious. Have you *seen* some of these theories?"

Toshinori chuckled. His laugh was nice and warm, like hot cocoa. *"I must admit my favorite is that you were secretly dating an ethereal being from another world and in the process of bringing about galaxy-wide peace, only for the agreement to fall through when they cheated on you."*

Hawks stifled an undignified snort. "Oh really? That's news to me. What else about my secret life do I not know about?"

"*Hawks..."* Toshinori said with exaggerated seriousness. *"...why did you not tell me that you had an evil twin that betrayed you? Oh, you did! I simply did not see it!"* He sighed

dramatically and Hawks imagined him putting a hand to his head. *"Is that why you talked about the evil clones in **Space Saga**? Were you trying to warn me?"*

Hawks gave up on stifling his laughter. "Oh yeah, *definitely*. I had no idea my totally-real evil twin was coming over to declare his evil plans last week, I swear! He was supposed to arrive on Wednesday but apparently his plane was ahead of schedule because of the nice weather we've been having. Sorry for not telling you. Next time my evil family comes around I'll make sure to inform you before the internet finds out."

Toshinori's chuckles became full laughter, which quickly changed into a coughing fit.

"Are you okay?" Hawks asked urgently.

"*I'm fine."* Toshinori panted, audibly out of breath. *"My illness is simply acting up."*

Hawks chewed on his lip. "Wanna talk about it? I always rant at you about stuff..."

"*I'll decline for now. I am not ready to speak about it."* Toshinori said but not cruelly.

There was a brief, uncomfortable pause.

"*But as for our betrayal tale… It's **not** all a fabrication though, is it?"* Toshinori noted. *"You've been upset these past few days."*

Hawks's feathers fluffed up defensively. He forced them to flatten as he stared stonily at the wall.

"*We don't have to talk about it."* Toshinori amended instantly.

"I *want* to." Hawks admitted. "I've been bottling up a lot of things lately and I can feel it bringing me down. Sometimes I'm so stressed out I'm scared I'm going to puke." He thought about Endeavor, and the Commission, and the voices and the future and— He gulped and gripped the phone tightly. He could not talk about most of those things but… "Don't interrupt me. I don't know if I can keep talking if you do."

Toshinori remained quiet. Hawks could hear him breathing through the phone. He chewed on his lip and double checked that he could not feel the voices before continuing.

"I recently found out someone I trusted did... *things*… with my body while I was unconscious." He realized he was using the 'things' explanation just like the voices and gave a shaky laugh. "*Many* someones, actually." He leaned over and gripped at his hair with his free hand. "I just… I can't *believe* they did this. I thought I could *trust* them and— and they all went behind my back and *agreed* and thought it was okay to… to *use* me like that when I couldn't say no."

Toshinori was dead silent.

Hawks scrubbed at his tired eyes. "I mean, I never *said* no and that they couldn't— do that stuff. So… that's implied permission or something, r-right? Is that a thing?" His voice cracked. "So it's perfectly okay that when I sank into my head, they went and used my body

for what they wanted. It's okay, and I'm the stupid and selfish one for being upset even though they *used me* just like everyone else—"

The dam collapsed and Toshinori broke his implied promise to not interrupt.

"***Who did this?"*** He snarled and if murder was possible by uttering a word, many people would be dead.

Hawks jumped at the waves of fury he could practically *feel* coming through the phone. He hesitantly put it back to his ear, hoping Toshinori did not have a Quirk that let him explode technology from a distance.

"You don't know them. At least, I don't think so." he said honestly. "And it doesn't matter. There's no lasting damage or anything so it's *fine*. It's over and they promised they won't do it again. Nobody got hurt but— *Nobody* got hurt."

"'***Nobody got hu***—'" Toshinori stopped. His respirations were audible, as if he were taking deep breaths to try to calm down.*"How did you find out?"*

"They told me. They were feeling guilty about it so they admitted what they did." Hawks realized he was making the voices sound awful and felt the need to defend them. "They didn't have to. They could've just kept it to themselves and I never would have found out. So… that's something, I guess. 'Sorry' makes *everything* better." Hawks gave another weak chuckle and dragged a hand over his face. "What am I saying? They're suffering worse than I am but *I'm* the one complaining. Isn't that messed up?"

"*How 'messed up'."* Toshinori echoed tonelessly. He took an audibly shaky breath. *"How many?"*

Hawks blinked. "Huh?"

"*How many people hurt you?"* It sounded like he could barely force the question out.

"Eig—"

Hawks stopped just in time. Toshinori was not a Hero, but he worked at a Hero office. If Hawks told him the truth he may connect the incident to the first appearance of Ennea—Greek or Latin for 'nine'. Toshinori worked for All Might for a reason. He wasn't stupid. He probably knew how to see connections and if Tsukauchi was involved in the Ennea investigation, All Might's Agency could be too.

Crap. Hawks swallowed. "I don't know how many of them… used me… for the things." Damn, the voices and their awful evasion skills *really* were rubbing off on him. "Everyone knew about it and was present but only a few admitted it. The others were just… there. Doing nothing to protest or stop it." He squeezed his eyes shut. "*No*, that's not— I *don't* know if that's true. They *might* have protested or had second thoughts. I just… don't know. I *do* know one of them tried to take con— tried to when I was conscious, you know? But he stopped on his own terms. He's one of the good guys. So that makes it okay, right?" He gave another shaky, albeit a bit more hysterical, laugh. "This is so *stupid*. I don't even remember most of it

but I'm *shaking*. C-can you *believe* that?" He laughed more even though it was not very funny.

He heard a slight cracking sound and a low curse. *"Hawks, do you need help getting away from them? I'll pick you up if you aren't safe at Miruko's. And… I know a doctor that is trustworthy and will not inform anyone of your injuries, if you need her."*

Hawks's brow furrowed. "What? I'm not injured. Why would I need a…?"

He went over the conversation again and finally realized what Toshinori must be thinking. Did he suspect the Commission had interrogated Hawks already? Had Hawks implied that? It would explain Toshinori's anger— so like the voices'— and reassurance of secrecy. Did he know about the Commission? Did he know about *him*? Did *All Might* know?

Hawks felt his face drain of color. *Oh **shit**.* "*Nonono*— You misunderstand. I wasn't *beaten* or anything. It was— was a— a mental Quirk thing."

If he hoped that would calm Toshinori down, he was sorely mistaken.

"***What did they do?!"*** he thundered and Hawks recalled that using Quirks on people without their consent was a serious crime.

Double shit. Hawks grimaced. "…Exactly what I said. They used my body. *Literally*. Like… possession. They couldn't use their own bodies for… *reasons* and I was… a convenient choice, and, uh… *there*, so they… used me to do what they needed. I was unconscious or asleep the whole time so…"

He trailed off and wondered if this counted as self-termination. He was doing a jaunty dance to his own death at this rate. But it was too late to shut up. In fact, shutting up might just make things even worse, if that were possible. Hawks had dug his own grave. Now he had no choice but to lie in it.

He gripped the phone tighter. "I shouldn't have said anything. This was a mistake."

"*No."* Toshinori said fiercely. *"It wasn't. These people should be held accountable for improper and illegal Quirk usage."*

Hawks bit back a protest that the voices were Heroes so they *could* legally use their Quirks like this. That would not go over well, especially since these Heroes technically did not have licenses at this point in time. Nor could they get them or prove they ever had them. And could this even be considered a "Quirk"? True, they were stuck in his head because of a Quirk but that did not mean this would fall under Quirk usage when it came to the law.

"Well maybe I don't *want* or *need* them to be 'held accountable'." he said as firmly as he could. "Nothing good will happen if I keep crying about it. They're my friends. I need to forgive them and let it go. It's in the past, it's over, they regret it, they're sorry, they won't do it again, and we've all moved on."

Toshinori was quiet a beat too long. *"...It does not sound as if **you** have moved on."*

Toshinori likely meant it as statement.

To Hawks, after everything, it felt like an accusation.

"Well I *just* learned this happened so *excuse me* for being—" Hawks paused and clenched his jaw. "I *should* move on. It's stupid of me to be upset. I wouldn't even know what happened if they didn't tell me. I shouldn't punish them for being honest. Not when I spent all this time saying they should just tell me the truth."

A cracking sound came through the receiver. Was Toshinori gritting his teeth? No, it almost sounded like crunching plastic. His phone? *"Hawks, you know how serious these types of offenses are. We have laws about this for a reason."*

"I *don't* want them to get into trouble." Hawks emphasized firmly. "They're good people and they don't need *this* crap to deal with when there are real monsters out there to fight. They just made a bad call. It *hurts*, what they did. But they promised they won't do it again and I'm going to hold them to that." He scrubbed his face with his hand. "You don't understand. It wasn't malicious. They really were remorseful and they had no other choice."

"*There is **always** a choice."* Toshinori said gravely.

Hawks thought back on his life under the Commission's boot and repressed a shudder. "Not always." The fire died in his chest and his shoulders slumped. "I just wanted to talk to someone and get this out of my system before my doomed meeting with the Commission on Wednesday…" *So I didn't say stupid stuff there like I am now.*

Toshinori sighed and the last of the anger left his voice. *"I understand. And although I despise it, I will not tell anyone the details of your 'possession' unless you want me to start an investigation."*

"I don't need an investigation. I just need an open ear." Hawks admitted softly.

"*Then that is what I will be."* Toshinori stated, though Hawks could tell he was not happy about it. *"Hawks, are these people still in your life?"*

"Yes. I can't exactly separate from them but I don't think I want to anyway. There was a time where… our, uh… relationship was pretty bad but things are better now than they were. They're finally talking to me. And we're finally getting a good balance. At least… I *thought* we were." Hawks sighed. "You know, I kinda expected you to preach about forgiving them. Not… *this*."

"*Forgiveness is **sometimes** an ideal to strive for, but it should **not** come at the cost of your own well-being, happiness, and safety."* Toshinori stated.

"But holding a grudge comes at the cost of *others*' well-being." Hawks argued. "I don't want to be petty and ruin our friendship because I'm upset over something so trivial. That would be stupid."

"*What they did is not 'trivial'. And it's **not** petty to be hurt when someone breaks your trust and uses you. No matter their intentions, it still left you hurt and afraid."*

"I'm *not* afraid of them." Hawks claimed.

Toshinori did not argue with him. Nor did he agree.

"*Do you want to forgive them, Hawks?"* he asked.

Hawks stared at his phone in bewilderment. *What kind of question is that?* He hastily put it back to his ear. "Of course."

"*Then speak with them. Tell them exactly how you feel. Let them know what they did is wrong and that while you may forgive them, you will not forget and you trust they will not do it again. Stay with them if you must, but keep an eye on them. And if they betray your trust again, do **not** feel you must endure it. You **can** leave."*

Hawks heard the odd undertone to Toshinori's voice and frowned. "You don't want me to stay."

"*No."* Toshinori admitted. "*To be honest I think you should put some distance between yourselves after having that conversation, but when you say you cannot separate, I believe you. Regardless, I'm keeping my word. Call me whenever you need to. About anything. You're **not** alone. And when… **if** you are ever ready, you can tell me the full story. I'll **believe** you. I'll **help** you. I swear it."*

Hawks wished he could believe that promise would be kept. "Thanks for listening to a near-stranger again. Hopefully our next conversation won't be so heavy, ha ha. And sorry I made you late. Again."

"***Never** feel guilty for seeking help, young man."* Toshinori said softly.

Hawks's fingers clenched around his phone. He mumbled a vague goodbye and quickly hung up. He stared at it for a moment and shook his head. Toshinori did not have all the information. He did not understand the full stakes. He did not know the voices were good people in a tough situation, and that Hawks should just keep his mouth shut and move on. He never would. He never could.

So maybe it was time to talk.

How much of that did you hear?

There was a pause.

"*Enough."* Green whispered.

The silence stretched for several minutes, where Hawks could feel nothing from them. He was certain they could feel emotions from him, however.

He took a shuddering breath.

Okay. First let's talk about ***boundaries*** .

XXXXXXX

Thud.

Thud.

Thud.

Thud .

There was only so much time that someone could take loud, obnoxious noises before their patience ran out. It had been hours since the thudding had begun echoing through UA's campus and even Present Mic was getting annoyed.

Aizawa congratulated himself for lasting so long as he stormed down the hall of UA towards the faculty members' gym. Classes had ended hours ago, and Mic had been forced to fill in for All Might when he failed to show. Aizawa would bet his sleeping bag that All Might was here now if the incessant and irritating thudding was any indication.

Aizawa opened the gym door. A sandbag slammed into the wall next to him and exploded, showering its contents onto the floor. He looked from it to the one who murdered it and unease curled in his gut. He never thought he'd see the day where All Might was genuinely pissed. Not without any villains threatening students around.

All Might breathed heavily, steaming from his mouth and shoulders, but remained in his muscle form. He glanced Aizawa's way with burning blue eyes and grabbed another sandbag. Aizawa strode forward and put a hand on it, stopping him.

"I think they've had enough." he said dryly. "What's got you so angry?"

All Might turned away from him and hooked up the bag. He did not immediately obliterate it, instead staring at it like he was seeing through it.

"I trust you, Aizawa." he said suddenly. "You have a level head, and know how to be discreet. So I trust you will tell no one what I tell you."

Aizawa did not need to confirm it, so he stood in patient silence as All Might gathered his thoughts.

All Might tapped the sand bag with a fist. He put no strength behind the blow and it swung back and forth like a pendulum. He caught the bag and forced it into stillness before letting his hands drop to his sides.

"There is a reason I was late today. I cannot share the details, but someone told me in confidence that friends of theirs used a Quirk on them while they were unconscious and asleep."

Aizawa was suddenly glad Present Mic had not come with him to investigate the noise. He would not take this statement nearly as well and would probably do something rash. Aizawa had been a Pro Hero for years but things like this still made him sick to his stomach.

Cases of 'improper Quirk usage' or 'Quirk Abuse' were disturbingly common, Quirk Abuse in particular. Humanity could be an awful species, and it was unfortunately unsurprising that some saw the perverse and cruelty potential of their Quirks and wanted to use them.

Why *shouldn't* they use their silencing Quirk to get their child to stop throwing a fit? Why *shouldn't* they use their air-manipulating Quirk to smack their spouse from a distance to let them know they stepped over a line? Why *shouldn't* they use their pheromones Quirk to make someone want to sleep with them? Their Quirk was a part of who they were, like their legs or their arms, so why should they be told how and how not to use it?

The stigma was illogical, but there was a reason some Quirks were labeled as 'villainous' without their user doing a thing.

"He was about to say '*eight*' when he stopped himself. *Eight* people he trusted used him when he was *unconscious* and unable to say no." All Might turned away and punched clean through another sand bag. He did not seem to realize he had let the person's gender slip.

"Was he hurt?" Aizawa asked, dreading the answer.

All Might's wide shoulders were stiff. "Not physically. He had no idea something unusual even occurred until recently. *They* were the ones to reveal to him what happened out of guilt. They apologized and promised to never do it again, so he thinks that makes it *alright*. He claims he wants to forget it happened and move on but that isn't completely true. He refuses to admit it, but I can tell he's *terrified* they will do it again."

He clenched trembling hands into fists. "This person does not want to press charges or open an investigation. I cannot tell whether he genuinely believes his friends made a one-time mistake or if he's in denial that he's in a possibly toxic relationship." He scowled. "Friends can manipulate and hurt you just as easily as family and lovers. And if I hear these 'friends' of his took advantage of him again I'll— *I'll*—"

He deflated— literally— and Toshinori Yagi sat heavily on a bench.

"I don't know what to do. He keeps insisting that I do not have the full story and they had *'good reasons'* to possess him and use his body for themselves. He would not tell me what they made him do. I'm not sure he himself knows. And he seems convinced he cannot leave them… I fear I will answer the phone one day and he'll tell me they betrayed his trust and possessed him again, or *worse*." He put his head in his hands. "With all my power, I'm still *helpless*."

A *possession* Quirk was involved? Not good. Those were tricky, and their users tended to be very dangerous when cornered. As in 'take hostages by possessing them and threatening to kill them' dangerous.

Aizawa sat beside Toshinori and put a hand on his shoulder. "Think of this logically. Maybe your friend is being truthful and the situation truly is an isolated incident."

Haunted blue eyes locked with his. "But what if it *isn't*?"

"Then we help him." Aizawa stated simply. "You're a Hero. You *know* what we can do."

Toshinori sighed heavily and stared at his bony knees. "I do. But this is *different*. Loathe as I am to admit it, it's *personal*, because I made it that way. He's so *alone*, Shouta… He does not admit it, but I can tell he is desperate for companionship without strings attached. A kind young man like him should have so many friends, but all he has are those eight, some others he feels he cannot be vulnerable with, and myself, a near-*stranger* he feels he can talk to…" His fingers clenched into fists and he considered them for a pause. "He's a textbook case of a young soul who could easily end up attaching themselves to someone horribly abusive out of a need to feel wanted. He *needs* more people to look out for him, or I fear we will lose him permanently. *I fear for his safety.*" He spoke the words with horror, as if he could not believe he were uttering them.

"So what do we need to do?" Aizawa asked levelly.

He mentally went through a standard list of questions for this type of situation. How old was the victim? What was his relation to the suspicious parties? Did he have a support system to fall back on? What kind of hold— legal, mental, emotional, and/or physical— did the suspicious parties have on him? If necessary, was there anyone he could turn to for financial support? What was the other party's social status and would it affect the investigation?

Toshinori continued to study his hands, hands that had helped so many. "Aizawa... you are going to keep meeting with Eri and Hawks, correct?"

Aizawa blinked, wondering what that had to do with their topic of conversation, then came to a logical conclusion. His eyes widened slightly but he gave no other reaction.

"If you can, make sure he takes care of himself, would you? That young man has too much on his mind." Toshinori looked at him, more tired than he had ever seen before. "And from what he accidentally told me, the Commission may be cornering him soon. I think I need to speak with Detective Tsukauchi."

XXXXXXX

I can stop him.

Hawks pushed through a throng of screaming, fleeing people, keeping his footing as the ground shook. A fissure tore open the street and he caught a man before he could plummet into the crack, yanking him backwards with his scarf to safety. The man stammered a thank you but Hawks had no time to reply. He kept running, heading towards the rattling buildings, broken street, and smoke-filled air that civilians fled from.

I can stop him.

Hawks's mask filtered the air as he breathed but his eyes still watered. Aizawa-sensei's voice lectured him in his mind, telling him he should have invested in goggles as well. He ignored the pang of grief the thought of his fallen teacher gave him and pushed himself forward, using his scarf to swing over a chasm.

I can stop him.

Hawks did not know which member of the Paranormal Liberation Front was in the area. Could it be Re-Destro? Muscular? Dabi? Shigaraki himself? Whoever it was, they were fighting and destroying the city in the process.

I can stop him.

A black blur flew past him, so close he felt the air ripple as it hurtled by. The person slammed into a storefront and went straight through the window. Hawks recognized the suit the person wore and a horrified scream built in his throat. To his relief— and shock— Phantom Thief emerged from the wreckage, costume torn but otherwise unscathed. Phantom Thief did not acknowledge Hawks and leaped forward with unnatural speed, black markings rippling over his skin.

Hawks recognized that energy as a copied Quirk. The enemy must be Re-Destro. He needed to be caught up to speed.

"Phantom Thief, where—"

Phantom Thief ignored him and charged forward with a furious roar. Hawks caught a glimmer of movement and saw Re-Destro emerge, his amputated legs replaced by robotic prosthetics. He barely took a step before Phantom Thief collided with him, sending them both crashing through another building. It fell on top of them.

Hawks's horror doubled. He ran after them, a small and unnoticed party as the two powerhouses brawled. Hawks remembered a time Phantom Thief considered himself a side-character, unable to be like All Might and meet power with power on his own, but he had grown. He had adapted, like they all had.

Monoma considered himself an anti-hero, but he was Heroic at heart.

So *why the hell was he fighting like they were in an empty city?*

Something exploded, sending a bone-rattling shudder through the earth, and Phantom Thief stumbled. Re-Destro vanished into the smoke, and Phantom Thief made to go after him.

Hawks grabbed his arm with his scarf. Phantom Thief pulled at the capture weapon but did not break free like Hawks easily knew he could. Either that or his time with the copied Quirk was running out.

"What are you doing? He's *getting away!*" Monoma bellowed. Was he so enraged because of the Stress Quirk or was it all him?

"I *don't care.*" Hawks snapped. "These civilians need help—"

Gas ignited down the street and a series of explosions went off, filling the sky with blackened smoke. Both Hawks and Phantom Thief could only gape at the destruction before Hawks stormed up to this fellow Hero, getting in his face.

"What the hell were you *thinking?*"

The last of the markings faded from Phantom Thief and he turned on Hawks, jabbing him in the chest. "I copied his Quirk to fight on his level. I had him cornered until *you* showed up!"

"Look around you! You caused as much damage as the *Villains*!" Hawks bellowed.

"It would have been worth it if we captured Re-Destro." Phantom Thief snapped.

He turned on his heel and Hawks knew he was going to run after the former leader of the Meta Liberation Army. He was going to pursue an enemy rather than help the screaming, fleeing people struggling to survive around them.

Hawks's anger vanished. There was no time to be angry.

These people needed help.

Now.

And if there was one thing Hawks learned these past few years, it was sometimes, morals needed to be sacrificed for the greater good.

Phantom Thief had already responded.

So he simply gave the order.

"**Stop trying to pursue Re-Destro and *help me save lives!***"

Hawks did not open his eyes.

'*Gonna be a Villain Villain* ***Villain****—'*

The voices were already scrambling in the back of his mind, trying to sort out their feelings without clouding Hawks's. Purple stayed in the middle of them like the eye to their frantic storm, but rather than exuding an aura of deceptive calm, his numbness spoke of resignation.

"*Stop feeling shitty, Purple."* Orange said before Hawks could speak.*"That bastard didn't deserve your guilt—"*

"*Orange."* Green said in warning.

Orange went silent.

Hawks ignored him and the other voices except Purple.

You are not a Villain.

"*Villains use their Quirks on people without their consent."* Purple intoned flatly. *"They force their will onto others to make them do their bidding. My method is simply more straightforward—"*

*And you call **me** self-deprecating,* Hawks interjected. *You did what you thought was right.*

"*Oh, really?"* Purple challenged. *"So was it 'right' for me to brainwash you?"*

No, Hawks said simply. *But you did it with good intentions. Afterward, you **realized you were wrong**. You apologized, regret it, and I know you won't do it again. You are **not** a Villain.*

"*But I've done pretty villainous things."* Purple said stiffly. *"I've brainwashed people. I've mastered my Quirk to the point where I can manipulate their very memories and personalities. I've **done it** too. All in the name of the greater good. Sacrifice the few to save the many."*

Green shifted uncomfortably but said nothing and kept his thoughts to himself. He and the voices whispered among themselves and retreated.

That does not make you a Villain, Purple. Hawks repeated. *You've realized that kind of thinking isn't… the best.*

"*Are you sure?"* Purple challenged. *"What's going to stop me from taking control of you the next time you disagree with us?"*

Hawks's mouth went dry, but he had an answer. *Your morals. You're good people.*

"*I cannot say whether your faith is misplaced, endearing, or foolish.*" Purple muttered, resigned.

Hawks could tell he did not believe him. How could Purple, when his faith in himself had taken such a hit?

That's okay. Just keep what I said in mind and don't let it eat you up inside, yeah?

"*That's hypocritical coming from you."* Purple scoffed, but he did not sound angry. He just sounded tired. Hawks waited for him to retreat but instead he lingered. *"I'll try to take your words to heart if you take these to yours…"* Hawks felt Purple focus completely on his emotions. *"You can say 'no' if you don't want us to use your body. We'll listen."*

Hawks thought back to their earlier conversation about boundaries, permission, teamwork, and consent and the rules they had put in place. The voices would not use Hawks body and tell him afterward. They would discuss such actions beforehand and get his permission. The only time they should take control without permission was if Hawks was helpless or drifting and their lives were in danger.

Communication was the biggest matter they had gone over and one Hawks was pleased to say he emphasized, because like it or not, Hawks was part of their team now and he needed to know these things. Green in particular seemed to have the most trouble with that notion, though Hawks guessed it was because he was used to being the one the others looked to for

orders. The voices could not act on their own anymore. Well they *could*— as they had shown — but Hawks clung to the hope that they would keep their promise this time.

I know.

"***Do*** *you?"* Purple murmured, almost to himself.

He retreated before Hawks could come up with a response.

Chapter End Notes

Guardianspirit13 drew Ennea! :D :D :D See the fanart here.

The Meeting

Tuesday night came, and once again, Hawks could not sleep.

Whenever he closed his eyes, burning hands would grab his arm and throat, startling him awake as he clutched at the non-existent injury. He eventually gave up on sleep and went to Miruko's laptop. Logging in to incognito mode, he began researching the affects of abuse on families. He knew all the procedures and steps to arrest and convict, but he just…

He just…

Hawks clicked on a scholarly article about the psychology of abusers and found himself directed to some books on the subject. He minimized the page without looking.

White? You're being pretty quiet in there…

"I am fine." White said with his usual blunt tone. *"You can look up this if you want. It won't upset me."*

Hawks hesitantly opened the page again but still did not look at them. *Are you sure?*

"Yes. Seeing this may help you..." Hawks felt the word 'cope' in his thoughts. *"...understand, correct?"*

Maybe. Or it might make me feel worse. Hawks's hand clenched around the mouse. *But your comfort is more important. If you don't want me to look at this, tell me.*

"It is alright." White reassured him. *"I have made peace with my feelings towards my father and this will not change them."*

...Okay.

Hawks looked at the page and began to read. He read some books and articles on the psychology of both active and 'reformed abusers'. In the latter case, the outlook was rather nauseating. Most abusers did not randomly go 'Oh, I hurt my family. I should stop that.' They only changed their behavior because of outside influences such as an ultimatum i.e. legal repercussions or court-ordered therapy. And even those 'changes' were often not done out of a selfless desire to right past wrongs.

The use of the term 'benevolent/benign dictator'— more commonly used to refer to certain types of government outside of this context— in one article stuck out to him most. It referred to an abuser who quote unquote 'meant well' and exercised their need for control in a way that it *appeared* to be for the benefit of the family. But control was still control, and they were still manipulating their families in a way to achieve selfish goals. Mainly maintaining their control, either consciously, through habit, or unconsciously.

Another common behavior that lingered in Hawks's mind was how some abusers expected forgiveness because they felt they deserved it. Their family leaving them and refusing to see them again was a non-existent option in their minds. They were trying to be better, so why weren't their families accepting them? How could they be so 'cruel' as to reject them when they had changed? Didn't they know they were a better person now, who should be rewarded for doing good?

But there were also those that felt genuine remorse and truly wanted to make amends. They realized they had done others harm and wanted to fix it, even if that meant losing their families— though for many, they had lost their families long before that point. So… they should get that chance, right? The chance for a realization, remorse, and self-betterment?

Right?

Hawks could not bear to look at the articles anymore and minimized the page. He forced himself to open it again because he *needed* to try to understand Endeavor's possible psychology so he had an idea of how to react to it. Especially so any anger would be directed at Hawks himself and not elsewhere.

"Gold, I think you need to stop." Pink murmured.

"Agreed." Silver said. "*This is wearing on you mentally."*

I'm fine. His thoughts sounded kinda… toneless. And he felt numb. Weird, that.

"You're not." Green denied.

Defensive anger bubbled in Hawks's skin but it petered out pathetically. *It doesn't matter if I'm fine or not. I can't sit in a corner and cover my eyes and ears when it comes to this. I'm **investigating**, as is my job. And I need to do this for Shoto and his family.*

"But what would exposing Endeavor do?" Purple questioned. *"How would it benefit anyone other than the enemy? In our timeline it only benefited the villains."*

The Commission would say that too, Hawks mused.

Purple flinched.

Sorry. Hawks took a shuddering breath. *This isn't about exposing him. This is about getting the people he's hurt out of there safely and ensuring they **remain** safe. To do that, we need to predict how badly he may react. An arrest may be possible but considering his status and the statute of limitations, it's highly unlikely. Thus, getting the kids out and maybe minimizing chances for interaction with his wife.*

If Hawks distanced his former idol's name— *all* the Todoroki's names— from the case, it became a bit easier to be rational. He should be rational regardless. Emotions and personal feelings had no place in these cases. He should know better than that.

His jaw clenched. *Making him go to court-ordered— or even psychologist-suggested— therapy is another option. Though in those cases, it may not be our decision to make. It may*

be up to the ones he hurt to decide what they want to happen. Some push for therapy, others for separation, etc.

"They'll want different things." White warned. "*Fuyumi was willing to forgive out of a desire for us to be a family. Natsuo did not forgive him, ever. And although I could work with him, it was never as family.*"

Hawks remembered the nightmares that may be White and Shoto's shared past and shivered. *Would present you come forward?*

*"Unlikely. I wouldn't see why I'd **need** to, plus I believed such matters were meant to be private. And I know Endeavor's role in Hero Society. It'd cause too much of an upset if this became public. Even when he had… 'changed', the public turned on him in an instant."*

Hawks bit his lip and took another shaky breath. *What if I tried to do something and maybe kickstart that realization of his?*

He got eight startlingly vehement *"**No**."*s as a response.

"Gold, it's not your job to make Endeavor realize what a bad parent he's been." Green said firmly.

"*Agreed."* White stated, and his statement had a lot more weight than Green's.

But if I do get through to him, then that might make things better for Shoto and his family, right? Hawks argued. His stomach twisted into knots. *Or at least make it less likely he'll explode if something happens—*

"This isn't your responsibility. Endeavor is responsible for his own actions." Orange interjected with such rage that Hawks's skin felt hot.

"*Again, it's **not** your job to make him a 'better person'."* Green repeated.

But I know the future, Hawks protested. *I know he can at least **stop**. Whether it's from remorse or— in his mind— necessity because of his new role as Number One, I can't just leave things as they are and let whatever play out. Endeavor has a deathgrip on his goal to beat All Might using Shoto, and as long as he has that mindset, he won't let Shoto go and nothing will change. Even with evidence, civil action is so unlikely… Surely I can at least **try** something else?*

"*Gold... Endeavor **won't** listen to you."* Silver interjected bluntly. *"You could appeal to him rationally, morally, or emotionally, but he won't see the damage he's caused. He still thinks he's working towards his goal and the 'sacrifices' he has made are worth it. In fact, if you try to guide him away from his… current mentality, it might just make him cling to it more."*

"*He **beat up his wife and two of his kids for years** because he couldn't surpass All Might himself."* Orange enunciated. *"He only 'changed' because surpassing All Might was no longer an option. If his own fucking sense of morality and the human decency to not **beat his four***

year-old son so hard he puked *couldn't stop him, a 'lazy upstart' he hates and bullies certainly won't."*

Guilt clogged Hawks's throat and he dropped his gaze from the bright computer screen. *I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound like I'm defending him.*

"*It didn't sound like that at all."* White reassured him softly, and if anyone else had said it Hawks probably wouldn't have believed them. *"You're just trying to rationalize things in an attempt to cope."* Those words sounded suspiciously therapist-like. Hawks did not know how to feel about that. *"This situation is… complicated. And stressful. And personal. I understand your conflicted feelings. Your situation was similar, correct?"*

Hawks went rigid. *Excuse me?*

"*We both went through training no child should because we were raised to be Heroes by… unfitting guardians. And your fixation on the 'benevolent dictator'— the ones who make it seem like it is for the benefit of the whole to comply— That's what they did to you, correct?"*

Even in his own head, Hawks could not muster the ability to share his thoughts.

"*...Gold?*" White sounded hopelessly, innocently confused. *"Why are you upset? Did I say something wrong?"*

No, Hawks forced out. *I'm fine. You didn't say anything wrong.*

It would be cruel to tell White that he was mistaken and wrong because Hawks was *not* abused by the Commission— Why did White think he was?— so he kept that thought to himself. The fact that White had that misconception made Hawks feel like the worst person on the planet, because White mistakenly believed Hawks had been through something comparable to his awful past. He believed Hawks had suffered as he had, and was extending compassion based on a misunderstanding.

Hawks was *not* abused. He was selfish, slow to learn, and ungrateful so the Commission had to be harsh when training him. The Commission had made him the Hero he was, but sometimes he did not accept that and acted out. His situation was not like White's at all.

Hawks had been trained. White had been *abused.*

And Hawks had unintentionally manipulated him. He had been taught how to play people so they'd feel a certain thing towards him, and the Commission always said he was manipulative and tried to trick people into feeling sympathy for him, usually by acting pathetic and holding back crocodile tears. Had he done that to White? He hadn't meant to.

Hawks forced the guilt deep into his mind, praying the voices had not noticed it. He heard White start to say something else but Green shushed him. He shut down the computer and crawled into bed, hoping to get at least an hour of shut eye before tomorrow. Or later this morning, apparently, since it was two a.m. The voices soon retreated into their 'rooms', leaving Hawks with only his own thoughts for company.

He still could not fall asleep.

That was probably a good thing.

XXXXXXX

Wednesday morning came too quickly.

Hawks slept exactly zero hours. Who needed nightmares when his own racing and nightmarish thoughts kept him wide awake?

He slowly got dressed in his costume— feeling more like he was getting dressed for his own funeral— and wondered how to hide bloodstains from Miruko until he could get them out. He would wear civilian clothes that he could throw out but that would just make things worse. He was a Hero, not a person.

"*Going full Vigilante is becoming more and more appealing by the second."* Green said flatly.

"*Uh oh. Green wants to go full Vigilante. Everyone run!"* Yellow joked. It did not hide his unease.

If we run they'll just think we're guilty, Hawks reminded them as he methodically put on his gloves. *Whatever happens, do not interfere. They'll lock us up— or worse— faster than you can fight back.*

"*I'd like to see them try."* Orange growled.

"*Well, **I** wouldn't."* Pink argued. *"Remember, Gold will be the one to suffer most if we're caught. And I don't just mean potential spying. Could you imagine what they'd do if they realize he has nine Quirks at his disposal?"*

"*Please stop. I already have nightmares."* Yellow said weakly.

Their arguments made Hawks feel queasy. He swallowed. *I think you guys should check out.*

"*We're not leaving you alone."* Silver denied.

*You **have** to. Lock yourselves inside completely.*

"*I don't know if we can."* Green mentioned.

*Again, you **have** to. Please, I know it's tempting but we can't just mess up or go on the run to escape them. We have people here to save.* He dragged a hand through his hair. *Let's just try to get this over with as painlessly as possible, okay? Think of it as a doctor appointment or something.*

"*Because doctors cut you up too?"* Orange sneered.

I'm not going to be cut up.

"*Right. Just tortured."*

I'm not going to be tortured. Just questioned.

"*Wow. You're **such** a better liar than we are. I almost believed you there."*

They could always do worse. Hawks blinked rapidly. *Look, what's going to happen will happen. I can't avoid it but you can.*

"*You know… I knew a little girl who thought that too."* Green said quietly. *"She also thought she had to accept the pain other people put her through. Her name's Eri."*

Hawks did not flinch but it was a close thing. *This is different.*

"*It is."* Green agreed. *"But you feel equally trapped. You can't rescue yourself, just like Eri couldn't. So we'll help you however we can. May I please take control?"*

His tone was pleasantly level with a hint of steel. Trusting Green not to go burn down Commission HQ, Hawks let him slip into control. Hawks's vision blackened, but before he could panic, he was back in control again. He glanced at the time. It still read the same numbers.

"*We'll get out of your way now."* Green said, far too agreeable compared to just a second ago. *"Trust them to have your back."*

What and who?

It was too late to get a response. Green had already retreated deep into his mind. The other voices were gone too, leaving silence in his head. He could only hope their walls held and they did not try to play Hero. They should know better than to try. Hawks was a Hero. He did the saving. He was not saved.

He flew towards his destination.

He smiled at fans who spotted him.

He apologized because he could not sign autographs this time since he had a boring meeting to get to.

He arrived at Commission Headquarters five minutes early.

He did not give in to his desire to loiter outside. There was no point in delaying the inevitable.

The moment Hawks stepped inside the facility, he was in Quirk-suppressing cuffs with clamps around his wings. He did not fight as a bag was yanked over his head and he was dragged into the lower levels.

Keep calm and relaxed, he reminded himself as he had been taught. *It'll be over when it's over. You will never be rescued, only released. You can do nothing to stop it.*

His jacket was torn from his back, leaving him in the backless halter top he wore underneath. He was cuffed to a chair and the bag was yanked off of his head. If Yellow were aware, he would likely joke about how garishly cliché the interrogation room was. Cold grey walls. One-sided glass. Two chairs.

He looked around with clinical disinterest as his heartbeat slowed. Just like with a doctor's visit, he calmed down once he was there. At least, he tried to convince himself it was like a doctor's visit, though he had to admit his visits probably were not considered normal.

The door opened and he did not tense, remaining calm and relaxed because there was nothing he could do to prevent what was coming.

That apathetic relaxation vanished when someone he did not expect entered. Hawks was surprised they did not send in the questioners first. That was the usual procedure. As the President stopped in front of him and sat down, he kept his unease off his face.

"Before we begin with your interview, there is something that needs to be addressed." She said as if Hawks were merely there for a checkup. "My agents have informed me that you've been looking into the Todoroki family. You will cease such endeavors at once."

Hawks could not bring himself to laugh at the unintentional pun. He just felt cold. For a moment, he could only stare at her in stunned silence until he found his voice again.

"You *know* about what Endeavor has done?"

"We know nothing." she denied dismissively. "Your investigation is simply a waste of time. It is unbecoming of a Hero to partake in such frivolous and over-reactive actions based on the whining of a child."

If you know I'm investigating Endeavor, you must know Shoto has told me nothing, Hawks thought. He dare not say it and kept his anger off his face.

"There is no 'conspiracy'." the Commission President stated. "There is no great scheme to 'protect an abuser'. We are simply doing what is best for Hero Society. We do not *care* about Endeavor's home life unless it threatens the public's belief in Heroes. Do *not* become a threat, Hawks."

Hawks lowered his head and kept it bowed. His instincts screamed at him to remain submissive but he could not get Shoto's haunted expression out of his mind. Despite himself, Miruko's words echoed in his head. *"If Hero Society can utterly collapse because one Hero is abusive, I'm not sure it deserves to keep standing."*

Hawks looked up and met the President's gaze. "This *isn't right*. Just because Endeavor is a high-ranked Hero doesn't mean this should be swept under the rug. Do you know about his first son, Touya? He—"

"*Silence.*" she snapped. "What Endeavor does in his private life is *not* our concern.
You *will* drop this investigation or there will be consequences."

Hawks could hardly believe what he was hearing. "You can't just ignore—"

"Are *you* telling me what I can and cannot do?" she asked icily. "Are you that ungrateful to those who pulled you out of poverty and allowed you to become a symbol of this Society instead of another rat laying *dead* in the gutter? Do I need to remind you that *good Heroes* do not question those that work to keep the public safe?"

A chill went down Hawks's spine. He went mute and shook his head.

"I see your remember your lessons." The President did not smile. Her eyes were cold. "But if you are so dedicated to the cause, we will *gladly* give you a reason to want to become involved."

Unease curled in Hawks's gut. He realized the President was waiting for him to respond so he forced out a question. "What's that supposed to mean, ma'am?"

The Commission President folded her hands neatly on the desk. "You could become a publicly known abuse survivor. An inspiration. Both past *and* present. Heroes being abused is hardly talked about in our society, especially with their lives so private. And those in childhood tend to gravitate towards equally toxic persons in adulthood, do they not?"

Hawks did not say a word. He did not need to. He knew his face had drained of color.

He could scoff and argue no one would believe it. He could say that they would not be able to get proof of ongoing abuse but "evidence"— and memories because he *knew* they had such a Quirk at their disposal— could be easily faked. Every picture with a random bruise or injury would become "proof" something was wrong, and people were already looking closer because of Heartbreak's words.

He wished he could tell the President just how *disgusting* she was for seeing abuse and wanting to use it to manipulate people's sympathy. Worse, there *was* some truth in the tale she wanted to put forward. His parents had not been the best caretakers. Or could she possibly be speaking of—

No one. ~~T̃h̃ẽ̃ŕ̃è̃ẅ̃ã̃s̃̄n̄ō̲n̲é̲ e̲l̲s̲e̲.~~

The truth *could* come out that part of his past was fabricated but Hawks doubted the Commission would let that happen to their *beloved* ~~pet project~~ — Number Three Hero. Which meant others would take the fall.

After all, the only person he regularly interacted with in private was Rumi.

Rumi, who *he had told about Endeavor.*

"That won't be necessary." Hawks whispered.

"Excellent." she said pleasantly. She rose from her seat and headed to the door, letting a man and a woman in. "Do what you must. You may leave a few marks but keep it subtle. Let the public speculate and theorize as they always do."

"Yes ma'am." the two chorused.

Both were dressed in black from head to foot. Unlike Ennea, their figures were clear, identifying one as male and the other as female. Their voices were also unaltered, calm and almost benign, but Hawks knew better than to think they were truly benevolent.

Her code name was Pathfinder. Her Quirk allowed her to track responses— both physical and emotional— and stories to see whether her target was contradicting their own tale. It was not as clean-cut and precise as Tsukauchi's Quirk, something which Hawks would bet infuriated her.

His code name was Amplifier. His Quirk let him inflict pain on others' with a touch and multiply it. He could have easily become a villain with a Quirk like that, but 'luckily' the Commission found use for him first. Hawks knew his touch firsthand.

"Will he need a remedial course, ma'am?" Amplifier asked.

Hawks forgot how to breathe. 'Remedial course' was a Commission agent's polite way of saying '*reconditioning*'. His head was already a mess. He was not sure he would survive a remedial course.

The President watched him with her cold, unsettling eyes, seeing if he'd squirm or maybe beg. He didn't, and she *almost* looked satisfied.

"No." the President said. "Tell me if that changes."

She left, shutting the door behind her and leaving Hawks with his two former trainers.

"Hey, kid." Amplifier greeted. "Long time no see."

Not long enough, Hawks thought but dare not say.

"You're good at this whole song and dance." Amplifier acknowledged. "And that's the problem. You could've gone rogue and be playing Hero."

"I haven't." Hawks said quietly.

Amplifier chuckled. It was friendly in a way that a hyena's laugh was friendly when it smelled fresh blood. "Really wish I could believe you, kid. As always, it's nothing personal."

Pathfinder put her hand on Hawks's jaw, splaying her hand on his throat above his pulse. Glowing blue tendrils oozed out from her fingertips like gleaming, writhing worms. The thin, malleable strands trickled up Hawks's jaw and around his neck. Some slipped into his hairline while others trickled down his spine. He knew what was going to happen next and forced himself not to tense, exhaling slowly. The strands down his spine reeled back like vipers and jabbed into his skin. They remained there, sticking to him like wires. The places they pierced burned. Hawks did not utter a sound.

Amplifier placed his hand on Hawks's upper spine in the empty space Pathfinder left between his wings and shoulder blades. Hawks stared unblinkingly at the ceiling and forced himself

not to drift. That would only make things worse for him.

They won't damage my wings too badly. They're too important.

As for the rest of him other than his pretty, marketable face? Not so much. And even his face could use some nice bruises so he could have reminders for a few days…

"Where were you this past year?" Pathfinder asked.

"In the woods."

Hawks felt a small tingle.

"Where else were you?"

"Nowhere. I was just in the woods."

The tingle became a sharp pain like a small electric shock.

"Who were you with?"

"No one was with me."

The shock became fire.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

The fire burned his flesh.

"Are you associated with the League of Villains?"

"No."

It boiled his blood.

"Where were you this past year?"

"In the woods."

His nerves were alight.

"Where else were you?"

"Nowhere."

Hawks was burning burning *burning*—

"Who were you with?"

"No one."

Burning burning burning—

"Did you come into contact with the League of Villains?"

"No."

Burning burning ***burning*** **burning**—

They went through the same questions again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

Sometimes they threw in other ones to try to catch him off guard but even while in pain, Hawks could play the game.

These two knew it.

They had taught him how.

That's why they pushed him so hard, because he knew how to lie. His word could not be trusted.

Keep calm and relaxed. It'll be over when it's over. You can do nothing to stop it.

After what felt like hours, Amplifier stopped using his Quirk. Pathfinder's tendrils receded from Hawks's flesh, leaving small, bloody holes down his back. Hawks slumped and breathed harshly, sweat running down his face. He knew it was not exhaustion or belief in his claims that gave him brief relief, but tactics. They did not want him to get used to it, after all.

Amplifier kept his hand on Hawks's back and patted his arm with his free hand.

Hawks did not flinch away.

The interrogator chuckled. "You're still so *good* at this, kid. I taught you well."

Hawks felt a hand wrap around one of his blood feathers. He only had a moment to brace himself before Amplifier yanked it out. To a normal human, it would be like losing a chunk of hair at the scalp. Hawks bit his lip and made no sound. Amplifier handed the bloody feather to Pathfinder, who put it in a plastic bag.

"We'll send this to get tested. You can stay here while we wait for the results."

Hawks did not argue. There was no point in protesting. They would do what they wanted to him no matter what he said. He was just along for the ride.

"Hey, Amplifier?" Pathfinder said. "We've spend the day being fancy when we didn't check for the basic tricks." Her gleeful tone betrayed her real motives.

"You're right," Amplifier acknowledged. "A few hits should break any glamours."

Hawks kept his head down. His heart sank into his shoes. They knew he was who he said he was. There was no doubt about that. This was not about the woods anymore. Not for this portion, at least.

They were not here just to question him. They were here to *punish* him. Because he had not checked in like all good agents must. Because he had investigated Endeavor. Because he *dared* to try to spread his wings. None of this was necessary. Hurting him like this would not make him crack and spill his every secret to them. He knew that. They knew that too. But necessity was not their purpose.

The Commission President's words earlier had not been a threat, but a promise. Hawks was going to show up with bruises, and people would wonder why. They would never suspect the wonderful Commission that had helped the Public so much. Instead— with a few anonymous theories on the internet with some 'other evidence'— their attention would turn to those closest to Hawks. He'd been so stupid to think vanishing and death were the only way his friends could be hurt. The message was clear.

This is what happens when you look for help, Hawks. What happens next is ***your fault*** .

He shut his eyes and braced himself.

If Red was aware, she'd tear up, hands over her mouth in horror— in part so she would not try to create a weapon.

If Orange was aware, he'd scream at Hawks to fight back.

If Yellow was aware, he'd try to distract Hawks while his anger boiled sharply under the surface.

If Green was aware, he'd sit in stunned silence at the sight of the corruption behind his beloved Heroes.

If Purple was aware, he may just well snap and brainwash Amplifier and Pathfinder so *they* were the ones hurting.

If Pink was aware, she'd try to soothe him, remaining positive as she did everything she could to shield him from the pain.

If Silver was aware, he'd shout about the injustice of it all, trying to come up with a legal way to expose it.

If White was aware, he'd blame himself.

But none of them were aware.

None of them were there.

Hawks was alone.

Good.

XXXXXXX

The moment the final bell rang on Thursday, Tokoyami made a beeline for the door. The school day was over. Classes were done until tomorrow. Homework was his future, but lessons and studying were in the past. Done were the hours of math and English. Gone was the overeager class representative who ordered him not to sit on his desk. For Tokoyami, freedom was mere feet away—

"Wait, Tokoyami!"

Tokoyami grimaced as he heard Iida's shout, but politely stopped in the hallway and waited for him— and Todoroki?— to catch up. Both had their school bags slung over their shoulders, as did Midoriya and Uraraka further back, but to Tokoyami's surprise, the other two friends did not join their group, instead heading past them and out the door.

The reason for their separation soon became apparent as Iida spoke in a low voice.

"Aizawa-sensei has offered to take us to see Er— er, Starling today. Would you like to come?"

It took Tokoyami a moment to remember 'Starling' was the name they used for Eri in public. He considered making an excuse. It was not that he did not want to see Eri, but the girl's unease around him wonder if he should be there. He knew it was not his fault, or hers, and he wanted her to be comfortable.

Before he could refuse, Todoroki's phone binged, indicating he had a text. He opened it, and when he looked up, his expression seemed colder.

"I'm afraid I cannot go. I have… training with my father."

"That is unfortunate. We will tell Starling you miss her." Iida said enthusiastically.

Tokoyami opened his mouth to remind him he had not agreed to go, but found himself pulled along to Aizawa's car. Their teacher seemed to count the number of students twice before a frown graced his lips.

"Where's Todoroki?"

"He could not make it." Iida said. "He has training."

"Hmm."

Aizawa's deceptively bored gaze landed on Tokoyami. He did not say anything, but Tokoyami had a feeling he knew about Eri's… aversion to his beak. He did not tell Tokoyami

to leave, however so they went on their way.

The halls of the facility Eri was being kept at were horribly bleak. Tokoyami normally preferred black to color, but even he was relieved when they entered Eri's room to see the walls covered with vibrant pictures. Eri looked up and her hopeful look fell slightly before she ducked her head.

"Hi, Mister Eraserhead." she mumbled towards her feet.

"Hello, Eri." he crouched in front of her and smiled. "I brought some old friends to see you. Do you remember Fumikage Tokoyami and Tenya Iida?"

She nodded and hugged herself. "They're Hawks's interns."

"That's right." Aizawa said patiently.

"Hello again, Eri!" Iida said enthusiastically, kneeling to her level. "It is good to see you once more. Oh! I brought something." He rummaged through his bag and pulled out a package of what appeared to be cookies. "My brother made these for us. Although sweets are not good for your health, I believe it is wise to indulge every once in a while. If that is alright with you, Aizawa-sensei."

"Of course." Aizawa allowed.

Iida set the cookies on a plate in the center of Eri's small table and they sat in the chairs, Tokoyami most hesitantly of all. He tried not to think that Eri was doing her best to avoid looking at him, but whenever she caught his attention, she was looking elsewhere.

It's not because I'm a mutant, Tokoyami reminded himself. *It's because of something terrible from her past.*

But what if that 'something' *was* a bird mutant like himself? What if that was why she could not bear to look at him?

Tokoyami only ate one cookie, his appetite gone. Although he knew Tokoyami's mood, Dark Shadow happily took his share.

When the cookies had been eaten, Aizawa instantly retreated to the wall and leaned against it, leaving his students and Eri at the table. The implied 'You figure out what you want to do next by yourselves.' went unsaid, and Tokoyami had to repress a frown at it. He noticed Eri was finally looking at him— or maybe Dark Shadow— and froze like a deer in the headlights.

"Er." His mind scrambled for something to do. "Do you… want to draw?"

Eri blinked owlishly at him and ducked her head. "Yeah."

She grabbed some crayons, shoved a few at him, and huddled over her page. Tokoyami glanced helplessly at Aizawa and his teacher motioned for him to come over. Tokoyami did as he asked and Aizawa put a hand on his shoulder.

"It's *not* you." he said quietly. "She's still uncomfortable around everyone except Hawks."

"But she's fine with Iida. *I* scare her." Tokoyami whispered back. "I should leave."

"You do *not* scare her." Aizawa said firmly. "If you did, she'd let me know she wants you to leave. She's just apprehensive because Hawks is not here, and likely finds Iida more approachable because she can *tell* you're nervous." He glanced towards the door with a frown and turned back. "She'll open up eventually. Just let her come to you, okay?"

Tokoyami nodded reluctantly and returned to the table, where Iida happily drew what might be Ingenium while Eri hunched over her page like it held her most closely-guarded secrets.

Tokoyami grabbed a blank sheet of paper and glanced at the black and very dark grey crayons before deciding to stay away from them for now. Eri probably would not appreciate his darker artistic inclinations. He eventually grabbed a blue crayon and began sketching UA's main building.

It was quiet, but a peaceful kind of quiet.

As he carefully sketched lines, Tokoyami found himself relaxing, becoming lost in his art. He felt hair something brush his arm but did not look at Eri as she peered over his shoulder. He kept his expression neutral, preventing his surprise at her quick turnaround off his face. Perhaps getting used to him *was* the simple solution.

"What's that?" she asked, pointing.

Tokoyami showed her the picture. "This is UA. It's where students go to become Heroes."

Eri blinked red eyes at him, the same color as his own. "Will I go there some day?"

Iida looked up, opened his mouth, shut it, and returned to his drawing, allowing Tokoyami to continue the conversation.

"If you want to become a Hero." Tokoyami acknowledged. "Though there are other Hero schools as well."

"Hawks went to Hero school?"

"Yes." Tokoyami wracked his brain but could not remember if Hawks was a UA alumnus or not.

"And you go to Hero school?"

"Yes. Iida, Todoroki, and I all do."

Eri looked down at his picture, then up at him once more. "Heroes save people."

It was not a question, but Tokoyami nodded. "Yes."

"They save people like me."

Again, it was not a question. Again, he nodded.

Her tiny fists clenched and her jaw quivered. "I will be a Hero, too."

Tokoyami blinked at her, and felt his stiff exterior soften. "I'm sure you'll be a great one." An idea struck him. "Why don't you draw what your costume will look like?"

Eri immediately ran off to do that. She frowned at the crayons, considering each one, before grabbing the blue, gold, and red ones.

"Hmm..."

Tokoyami heard Aizawa sigh. For a moment, he thought his teacher might disapprove of his encouragement of Eri— which in hindsight, made absolute zero sense considering Aizawa taught future Heroes— but he noticed Aizawa glancing towards the door again before he pulled out his phone. He glanced at it and immediately stuffed it back into his pocket. Aizawa saw Tokoyami looking and spoke softly to him.

"Usually Hawks is here by now."

Tokoyami could not deny the unease that curled in his gut. He could not forget what ended up happening the last time Hawks had vanished somewhere. He doubted many would.

"Maybe he got held up?"

"It's possible." Aizawa said, but Tokoyami knew that was Aizawa-speak for 'That's unlikely.'

Tokoyami was soon distracted by Eri running up to him to show him her picture of her Hero costume. She insisted he draw one as well— even though he already had one— but he decided he and Iida could indulge her. He followed her to the table and they spent the rest of the evening drawing whatever they could imagine. Every few minutes, Eri would look towards the door hopefully.

But Hawks never appeared.

XXXXXXX

Hawks's blurry vision focused and he found himself on the cold floor of the interrogation room. His left eye felt puffy and his throat ached, and he knew he'd have bruises tomorrow. They would not be that noticeable, with most easily hidden by his clothes.

But that was the *point*, wasn't it? A slipping sleeve or an online poster pointing out he had smudged the make up covering his black eye might be ignored or get an avalanche going. An avalanche that would hit all the wrong people and conveniently miss the right ones, proving that he was just another pawn to be moved for the public's entertainment, as always.

Does Shoto ever have to go to school with bruises or does training explain them away?

Two shadows fell over Hawks.

His trainers had realized he was awake.

He shut his eyes.

Amplifier and Pathfinder went through their questions again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

Hawks never wavered. He never revealed the voices, or their time traveling, or their Quirks, or their mission. He kept to his story— the *truth*— that he had been in the woods all year, alone, with no contact with the League of Villains or anyone else.

He could see Pathfinder was getting annoyed, because she loved a good narrative and his wasn't it. She wanted *more*. She wanted tales of corruption, betrayal, and treason. He did not have one to give her. So she took joy in creating her own story by leaving bleeding wounds down his back and compelling bruises on his skin.

In contrast, Amplifier was almost proud of him. He radiated joy as he used his Quirk on Hawks, but it was not a sadistic kind. It was like a father's when his son won first place in a contest, or what Hawks imagined such an emotion may be like.

To Amplifier, Hawks was a project he took pride in, and this was simply business. A business most people would find horrifying, but still business since someone had to do it. If Hawks did not know better— thank Miruko he did— he may think Amplifier hurt him to show he cared. In a twisted way, he *did* care, since he trained Hawks to resist torture for the good of others. Hawks almost admired him for it. How sick was that?

A few more warnings were left on Hawks's flesh, which frightened him more than the more-painful interrogation ever could. He should regret telling Miruko about Endeavor and trying to investigate him when he knew the Commission would never take kindly to him threatening to shake the status quo, but he didn't. He would never regret it.

If the Commission realized that, he did not fear what they would do to *him*.

As Hawks passed the threshold of pain and teetered on the edge of hazy apathy, Pathfinder released him from her Quirk and slouched. "I'm bored. He's so *boring*."

"I know." Amplifier said proudly. He ruffled Hawks's hair. "I taught you so *well*, kid."

Hawks did not shrink away from the touch. He did not react at all, not even a twitch. A trickling numbness passed through him that warned him he might start drifting soon, whether he wanted to or not. He could not let that happen. What if one of the voices accidentally— or intentionally— slipped into control while he was out?

An unexpected tap on the door should be a reprieve, but in this place, surprises tended to only bring misery.

Another agent poked his head in, expression grave. "Change of plans. You need to clean him up. Someone has come for Hawks."

Hawks hid his face, uselessly praying they had not seen it drain of the little remaining color it had. *Rumi, **please** tell me you didn't.*

"Why are you still here? *Send them away*, genius." Pathfinder said sarcastically.

He leaned close and whispered something to her. Faster than a flipped switch, her annoyance turned to rage. "Are you *kidding* me?" She turned and grabbed Hawks by his hair, yanking him up as she shook him. "Did you really think *All Might* could protect you? Where is your *pride*?"

For the first time since entering the building, Hawks let an emotion slip onto his face: shock. *What?* How had *All Might* found him?

"Not All Might. His *police dog*." the agent sniffed."Sirs, he *insists* he needs to see Hawks immediately for a case."

Oh. Hawks lowered his head. That made sense. Of course Tsukauchi needed him for a case. That was why he came here. Of course. Why would it be anything else?

'*You will never be rescued, only released.'*

"He's getting suspicious." the agent insisted.

"I don't have time to clean him up." Amplifier said steadily.

"The President says to send him as is." the agent replied. He stared at Hawks, and he belatedly recognized him as his driver from when he first left the hospital. "The detective may think he's a big dog but he's just a mutt. He's not important."

If he wasn't important, you wouldn't release me, Hawks thought. He did not say it. He couldn't.

They unlocked his cuffs and Pathfinder yanked him to his feet. Amplifier shoved his coat at him with enough force to count as a punch to the chest. Hawks hardly swayed and was able to put it on and walk on his own. He knew his former teacher's body language well enough to know he was glowing with pride.

Detective Tsukauchi was waiting for them in the lobby. Him and…

…Best Jeanist was here too?!

The shocked expression that flashed across the Commission agent's face told him the Fiber Hero had not been there when he went to retrieve Hawks. Tsukauchi spotted them first. His face remained stoic as if he had not noticed the blood and bruises on the young Hero's face.

Or did he not care? That must be it.

"Hawks, we've had a breakthrough with our case." Tsukauchi said instantly. "It's time-sensitive so we need to hurry."

He must be talking about the case with Eri. Hawks shoved his lingering pain away. They had bothered to get him released for this, so it must be important. He had to work. He had to be *useful*.

"O-Of course, sir. S-Sorry. I was in a meeting." He cursed himself for stammering but his tongue felt heavy, like it was made of stone instead of flesh.

His claim was a big fat lie. They all knew it but none spoke of it.

Just like it— [illegible] — should be.

Jeanist did not say a word. His fingers twitched. Mockingjay did that when she was angry, so Hawks kept a wary eye on the Fiber Hero as he consulted his memory for what he knew about him in order to brainstorm the best ways to get him to calm down.

"I understand. We must go. Good day." Tsukauchi inclined his head to the Commission agents.

Jeanist's hand— gentle, not painful— latched onto his elbow and Hawks found himself guided out of the building. He flinched as a street light shone in his eyes and blinked up at the moon.

What day is it? He asked.

There was a long pause.

"Did you try to speak?" Jeanist asked neutrally.

Hawks's pale cheeks turned red. "Sorry, sir. I asked what day it was."

"Thursday night." Jeanist said stiffly. "You almost missed our gathering tomorrow."

He had arrived at the meeting early Wednesday morning. So it had barely been two days? Hawks dropped his gaze in shame. "Sorry, sir."

The fingers grasping his arm tightened and he forced his sight to remain ahead so he would not see Jeanist's face.

"Do *not* apologize or *so help me*—" Jeanist stopped and took a deep breath.

His hand remained clenched around Hawks's arm. Although a part of Hawks nervously considered how Jeanist could easily break his arm if he twisted it the right way, he did not try to wrench it free.

They got into Tsukauchi's car and drove off.

Hawks did not realize he was shaking until he noticed his wings quivering. He cleared his throat and regretted it as his strained trachea twinged with pain. He shoved it aside because he had to *work* now.

"So what's the breakthrough, sirs?" he forced out, tone *almost* close to being normal. 'Almost' wasn't good enough but neither man snapped at him for it.

Tsukauchi halted at a stop sign, turned away from the road, and looked him right in the eye. "Eri's favorite color is red."

Hawks nearly choked. "W-What?"

"Any new information can be a breakthrough if you think about it." Tsukauchi said airily. His expression became cold as he turned back to the road and kept driving. "Or if you need an excuse."

Hawks stared at him uncomprehendingly. "But… that's not urgent at all. So why are you here, sirs?"

"To rescue you." Tsukauchi's voice was far too quiet.

'*You will never be rescued, only released.'*

Hawks continued to stare at him. Tsukauchi's words refused to compute and his brow furrowed in distant confusion.

"So why are you really here, sirs?" he repeated.

"We came to rescue you, Hawks." Tsukauchi said lowly.

There was anger in his voice— *Careful careful don't say the wrong thing.*— but Hawks was woozy and stupid and decided to question him again.

"You… just came here to *release* me?" That had to be what the detective meant since— '*You will never be rescued, only released.'* "Why?"

His foggy brain slowly processed the delicacy of his situation and that he should probably *keep his mouth shut*. He dropped his gaze as his wings pressed close to his body. He didn't know why his body always seemed to think that would stop people from grabbing them and pulling out fistfuls of feathers.

"Sorry, sirs." he said, forcing himself not to whisper. "I don't mean to be a pest. You don't have to tell me."

Tsukauchi's fingers were white on the wheel. Hawks kept his *mouth shut*, his back pressed to the seat despite how it made his wings ache, and his gaze flicking between the detective and Best Jeanist. They both looked angry though they were clearly trying not to be. Oh dear.

Okay. Breathe. Think. Plan. Tsukauchi is a policeman so 'joking' about him using excessive force might make him pause. He won't want to get into legal trouble. If it angers him instead

enough for him to grab you, suck it up. Jeanist cares about his image so complimenting his fashion line may appease him at least a little. If that fails, let him know you're beneath him and a waste of effort. That could make him back off—

Hawks's vision blurred and he feared he may pass out. Thankfully he didn't. He had to be awake and figure out why they needed him enough to release him. He didn't want to ask since they already refused to answer. He didn't want them to— ~~send him back~~ — become annoyed.

"How did you know I was here?" he mumbled even though he should *really* shut up until they brought him to wherever he was needed. They released him for a reason, after all.

"Miruko found the note you left on her table. She knew she'd act rashly so she called Jeanist and Toshinori, who contacted me."

Hawks's brow furrowed. *Note…?*

"Trust them to have your back."

Oh. How did Green know they'd need me so they'd release me? Why did they release me? Why won't they say? Hawks tried not to let his apprehension show because if they were being so secretive about their motives, they might not be good.

"Just as a warning—" Hawks tensed. "—she's feeling guilty it took so long." Tsukauchi continued. "She slept in her office last night and didn't return home until a couple hours ago."

"Hypocrite." Hawks whispered.

"Hawks, are you severely injured?" Jeanist asked professionally.

It seemed he had pulled himself out of whatever stunned stupor he had been in. Hawks should do the same. He should but he could not seem to because he knew he *still wasn't safe*. No, *safety* had nothing to do with this. He still did not know what they wanted him to do *and they weren't telling him*, so he needed to be functional and ready, not foggy-brained and tired and cold. He tucked his chin to cover his throat and shivered.

"Let me see." Jeanist ordered.

Hawks dare not disobey. Jeanist gently— *real* gently, not fake gently like Pathfinder— cupped his jaw and turned his head a little. Hawks let him expose his neck, struggling more with keeping himself from drifting than he did with his body, which he kept relaxed and easily poseable. Like a doll. Jeanist was just touching his neck a little and his hands weren't squeezing or shaking him and that was fine and okay. Hawks pretended he was at a modeling gig, which helped a little bit.

Keep calm and relaxed. It'll be over when it's over. You can do nothing to stop it.

*…**Why** was I released?*

"What did they do to you?" The disbelieving way Jeanist said it made Hawks question whether he meant to ask out loud.

"Nothing—" Hawks remembered Tsukauchi had a lie detecting Quirk. His heartbeat quickened. He couldn't get in trouble for not-lying to a policeman with that ability, right? "Amplifier has a pain amplifying Quirk." he said unsteadily. "Pathfinder's Quirk has, uh... tendrils that let her follow stories and see inconsistencies. The tendrils have to… um, poke into the skin for it to work. I'm used to their affects so I'll be fine in a..." The words he was looking for evaded him and he desperately scrambled for them. "...in a... uh, a few hours. I can work."

Jeanist's fingers were nice and cool and did not grab his throat to shut him up or to shake him for giving information. "And the bruises?"

Tsukauchi was still there so he had to be honest, right? The voices said he had to be honest. He didn't want them to get in trouble.

Hawks swallowed. "A message." His hands clenched into fists. "They threatened Rumi."

Jeanist's stoic expression twitched.

Mentioning Rumi is bad idea ***what have you done*** *you—*

"Tell me." Tsukauchi demanded. "This car isn't bugged."

Hawks shouldn't.

He knew what happened if he talked to people.

But if he kept silent, and something happened to Miruko, he would never forgive himself.

"I told her about—" Hawks swallowed Endeavor's name. "I told her about a possible abuser that's an important person so they threatened to make *her* seem like an abuser. Or— more likely— they'll do *something* to make her seem like a *Villain*." The latter option was the most probable since the President would not be sloppy enough to warn Hawks about what they planned to do. "It'll discredit both our words if we try to investigate… that thing which also has to do with someone abusing someone. I'll be the paranoid victim or the ignorant defender and she'll be the monster trying to divert attention by blaming other people." He blinked rapidly with his third eyelid, not daring to close his eyes. "They just wanted to remind me I overstepped my bounds and my life is in their hands. B-But Rumi doesn't have anything to do with that!"

He coughed and hastily checked his hand, relieved there was no blood. He shoved his lingering pain aside and looked desperately to Jeanist. "You can warn her right? I *can't*. They'll *know* if I try and they'll— *they'll*— I *can't*. You can, right? I'll pay you back however you like—" He was interrupted by another coughing fit. He felt Tsukauchi press on the gas and his stomach twisted. "Don't take me to a hospital. I *don't* need a hospital. It's superficial damage, mostly. I'll sleep it off after we do whatever you need me for. I can work."

"We don't need you for anything." Jeanist said.

Hawks wished they would *stop lying*. "Then why did you release me?"

The thud of a hand hitting the steering wheel made him jump. But it was okay, because it was better to hear that than see an angry hand coming towards him.

"This is *illegal*." Tsukauchi snarled. "It *all* is. Enhanced interrogation is against the *damn* law."

"It's not considered enhanced." Hawks mumbled. His exhaustion got the better of him and he leaned on Jeanist's shoulder. The Fiber Hero did not shove him off or grab him by the hair and slam his head into the window, which was rather nice of him. Hawks remembered not to push his luck and carefully leaned away. "Amplifier has his license and his Quirk leaves no lasting damage. And the beating was discipline for breaking the rules."

"It *clearly* wasn't." Jeanist said icily.

"Then it was from training. Or a villain attack. Or from a trip down the stairs. Or from rumors just like they hint they'll start circulating if I don't keep my mouth shut—" Hawks stopped and pulled his coat tightly around himself. "Please don't act blind and pretend I can report this. Please don't *try* to report this. You'll only make things worse."

"It seems we're all in a chain of threats then." Jeanist said quietly. "You tried to speak out, and they threaten Miruko. Miruko tries to speak out, they threaten you. And if we try to speak out…" He did not finish.

Tsukauchi's hands were tight around the wheel. "We'll continue this conversation at Miruko's —"

Hawks jolted upright. "*No*. Don't take me home. It might be bugged. Take me to Mockingjay."

It was the safer option right now. Not only would the bugs not be a problem, but Katniss was more levelheaded than Rumi. She hated the Commission but she would not go charging in to Headquarters to take them out Vigilante-style.

Hopefully.

XXXXXXX

"*I'm going to **kill them***." Mockingjay said in English.

"You know I can understand you, right?" Tsukauchi asked.

She looked him right in the eye, unrepentant. "I am going to *kill them*." she repeated coldly. Her grey eyes glinted, reminding him of a predatory bird sighting prey. "Am I lying?"

"I don't think I want to answer that." he said dryly.

If he were true to himself, he may just feel a little murderous himself. And a bit tired of how their world ran. Mostly though, he was angry at himself for being so blind.

The Vigilante Ennea's supposed connection to Hawks's past gave Tsukauchi the excuse he needed to start digging into the Winged Hero's upbringing. What he found was more than a little concerning— Forget that notion. It was probably one of the worst things he had ever seen because the Commission had partaken in what was essentially legal Quirk trafficking. They scouted children with powerful Quirks, paid off their parents, and raised the children to be what the Commission desired. Pro Heroes were only one 'career path' open to such children.

His fears about Hawks being bought and groomed were correct, though the documents he found used nicer and— for lack of a better term— *prettier* words to say a six year-old had been legally enslaved. Not only that, but when they failed to produce a completely obedient, conditioned Hero like they wanted, they cracked down on him with debts upon debts to keep him on a leash. Hawks had no hope of a life outside of the Commission's grasp. If he tried to come forward— if he even thought he could— he'd be crushed harder than a raw egg under a boot and swept under a rug with the other skeletons.

Tsukauchi glanced towards the room where Hawks was sleeping off this 'Amplifier's' Quirk — and a few sedatives Mockingjay may or may not have slipped into his drink. Tsukauchi would disapprove but he was not sure Hawks *wanted* to remain conscious.

Hawks was a bit out of it— he did not react at all when Tsukauchi asked for clarification on how he got those injuries down his back— though he himself did not seem to realize it. The way he spoke so confidently about how long the affects would last told the detective this was far from the first time these Quirks had been used on him. That did not bring any comfort to Tsukauchi's already-troubled mind.

He let his gaze drift over the other three Pro Heroes in the room, not that two knew the third was a Hero. It was a bit awkward having All Might there with Mockingjay, Jeanist, and the sleeping Hawks not in the know about his true identity.

But Toshinori Yagi *needed* to stay All Might's humble secretary. Especially with the Commission's shadier nature brought to light.

"Should you be here, Toshi?" Tsukauchi asked carefully.

The others would likely think he was referring to Toshinori being a 'civilian'. If only they knew the Symbol of Peace's view of the world had just been shattered into shimmering shards.

"Yes." Toshinori stated, but his voice was hollow. He gritted his teeth and put his head in his hands. "How could I let this happen?"

"Unless you're secretly a Commission Board Member, I don't think it's your fault." Mockingjay said flatly.

"Yet we must take some blame." Jeanist stated. "To be so blind to the corruption in a trusted pillar of Hero Society is simply unjustifiable. How long has this type of travesty been happening right under our noses?"

"For decades." Mockingjay said bitterly.

"You knew about this." Tsukauchi realized.

"And could do *nothing* except try to keep Hawks alive." Her fingers clenched into fists. "In four years I only got one win against them, and that was because they could afford to lose the piece of scum I targeted."

"Can you give me details?" Tsukauchi requested.

She looked him in the face as if daring him to avoid her gaze. "One of his handlers was fired before he could do more than call Hawks 'pretty' and bribe his way into personal hand-to-hand combat training with him."

Hearing her tone, Tsukauchi had a feeling Hawks had to beg her not to kill the man.

Tsukauchi wisely did not continue down that rabbit hole. He honestly did not want to think more about any of this, but he was a cop and it was his duty to make this right. He could not do anything less and bear to look himself in the mirror afterward. Not after what Hawks looked like when those agents dragged him out of whatever hell he had been in.

*I never want to see Hawks that… that **passive** again. Did he even realize he looked scared out of his mind? He looked just like that young girl Eri did when we mentioned bringing her to the doctor. Like he was headed to his execution but just accepted his coming death. And his insistence that we had to have rescued him for a reason… What the hell kind of thoughts did they put in his head?* Tsukauchi gritted his teeth. *We can't think about bringing the Commission to court or exposing. Not yet. First we need to help Hawks break free of them. But for that, he needs protection… He needs **Heroes**. Ones that the Commission can't slander or send away without causing an uproar in their precious Hero Society.*

Tsukauchi's eyes narrowed. "Toshinori, the Commission has no influence at UA right?"

"None." Toshinori said adamantly. "Nedzu does not see eye to eye with them. He lets them proctor the exams and tell the school good times to do internships but that is all. He insists UA remain an independent establishment."

"And so the teachers are protected from their influence?" Tsukauchi pressed.

"Yes."

"What about teaching assistants?"

Toshinori's blue eyes settled on him. "All staff members are. What are you thinking?"

Tsukauchi pushed the brim of his hat up. "To start off, we'll treat this like any other abuse situation. To help Hawks we need to separate him from his abusers and bring him somewhere

safe where they cannot get him."

"And you think UA is that somewhere." Jeanist realized.

Tsukauchi nodded sharply. "That's right. Not only will this allow him to have time off from fighting Villains— because we all know he's working himself into the ground— but he'll have other Heroes around to turn to directly. It will also distance him from Miruko and make the Commission's possible smear campaign less appealing."

"If they really want to discredit her word they'll find another way." Jeanist warned.

"And bring Hawks into the middle of it." Mockingjay snarled. "They *love* to give their exciting narratives to the public, and a 'broken friendship' is a juicy one."

Tsukauchi shot her a concerned look but said nothing.

"It sounds like you have experience." Jeanist brought up tactfully.

Her grey eyes grew cold. "I have experience with corrupt Hero sponsors and their *games*, yeah." She crossed her arms. "It probably hasn't hit Hawks yet that she's not being targeted *just* because of him. Miruko's been causing a ruckus ever since she reached the Top Ten. I know about how she used to push for Villain reintegration programs."

"'*Used to*.'" Jeanist echoed lowly. His expression showed nothing, but his voice was hollow. "That stopped around the time she met Hawks, didn't it?"

"Which is all the more reason to get Hawks into UA as soon as possible. Otherwise they might end up threatening *him* to silence *her*." Tsukauchi stated.

"Who's to say they aren't *already* doing that?" Jeanist murmured. "Those bruises likely won't be seen by the public if Hawks has any say."

A heavy silence fell over them.

Tsukauchi forced himself to break it. "Toshinori, do you think All Might can get Hawks a position at UA?"

Toshinori was not smiling. Not at all. His blue eyes burned like flames.

"I *know* he will."

Jeanist Delinquist

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hawks's eyes slid open. Well, his right one did. His left one only opened a crack. He squinted at the unfamiliar ceiling over his head and took a calm breath. His ribs ached as his lungs expanded, but a quick flex of his wrists showed they were unbound.

Step one was done. On to step two: figure out where he was.

He cautiously sat up, careful not to make the bed springs squeak. The nightstand next to him had no pictures, only a simple clock and lamp, and there were no photos on the walls. The bedroom looked empty and lonely, as if it were only used for basic functions and not really lived in. The closet door was closed, revealing a mirror that showed his reflection. Hawks took in his bruises and averted his gaze.

They really left a mark, huh?

"*Gold, can you hear me?"*

Hawks jumped at Green's solemn voice. *Hey. You're awake. Are you okay?*

"*Why are you always the one asking that?"* Red sighed.

"*What the hell happened?"* Orange demanded. *"You look like you got the shit beat out of you."*

I did.

"*We should have been there."* Silver said lowly. Hawks could feel his failure as if it were his own. Uh oh. Were the walls cracking again? *"We should have helped."*

I asked you not to. And hey, the Commission doesn't know about you guys. So I see that as a win.

"*You see* ***torture*** *as a victory?"* White demanded.

I'm alive, out of their facility, and not arrested or dead, Hawks thought bluntly. *So yes.*

He headed towards a side door and opened it to find a bathroom. Nothing inside it was recognizable except for the a small bottle of shampoo displayed on an upper shelf. It was a joke product labeled 'catnip scented'. Hawks knew that because he was the one who gave it to its owner. He remembered now. They were at Mockingjay's place. He had been there before, but never had a reason to go into her bedroom, though now he wondered if she kept him out because of how empty it felt.

He relaxed and picked up the tiny bottle of 'shampoo', chuckling. *You should have seen Katniss's face when I gave her this. Never before has such annoyance been on display. I can't believe she kept it. She **did** find it funny. That liar!*

"*How can you **joke** right now?"* Purple demanded. *"How can you just go back to your life like nothing happened?"*

Because this is nothing new. I've been trained to deal with questioning.

Hawks sensed odd 'pressure' from Pink. It persisted for a couple minutes as he went to the sink and washed his face.

…*What are you doing?* He finally dared to ask.

"*Hush. I'm trying to figure out how to hug you."*

"*Same."* Yellow added.

"*I am joining in with the attempts at psychic hugging!"* Silver declared.

Maybe if you figure out how to let me in to that house of yours we can try to hug it out, Hawks joked.

He returned to studying his reflection and grimaced. His lip was split and he had a black eye, along with some bruises on his cheeks and throat. He had no doubt there were also plenty of contusions— plus the wounds from Pathfinder's tendrils— under his clothes but he did not need to worry about those. Hawks had to cover the visible injuries with make up. He rummaged Mockingjay's bathroom to begin his search for the proper cosmetics. Hearing footsteps, he called out to her.

"Hey, Katniss? I know makeup isn't normally your thing but can I use the secret stash I know you have for missions?"

"Oh, is that Mockingjay's name?"

Hawks whirled in place, summoning a feather to his hand. He immediately lowered it.

A blond-haired man stood in the doorway, yet Hawks did not feel like his only escape path was blocked. Through his posture was hunched, the man was still tall, standing at around seven feet and two inches. He was bony and angular yet Hawks could not help but compare him to a teddy bear. He felt… *safe*?

Guys? Is there something you want to tell me?

"It's nice to see him like this again." Green sobbed.

Hawks struggled not to tear up himself. Thankfully, the voices remembered they had an effect on him and retreated into their room before he could start crying like Green. He already had Aizawa thinking he was an overly-emotional wreck. He didn't need anyone else to think he cried for no reason too.

"Oh. I apologize for startling you." The man smiled and held out his hand. "I'm Toshinori Yagi."

"I guessed." Hawks happily took the offered hand and shook it. "It's great to finally meet you face to face."

"I wish the circumstances were better." Toshinori said solemnly.

Hawks's smile remained in place. "Hey, they could be worse."

"That is true." Toshinori acknowledged.

Believing in his ability to multitask while holding a conversation, Hawks returned to rummaging around for cosmetics.

Toshinori watched him, expression curious. "Why do you need makeup?"

Hawks finally found Mockingjay's stash of cosmetics and pulled them out, starting the application process. "Oh, I'm just covering up the bruises, as usual. I can't let the public see a less-than pretty face." He paused to grin in the mirror at him.

Toshinori did not smile back. "This has happened before." It was not a question so Hawks did not respond. "Hawks, this *isn't* normal."

Oh, *great*. One face-to-face meeting in and they were having *this* conversation. Thanks to Miruko and Mockingjay, Hawks knew the song and dance by now and tried not to let his annoyance show.

"Yeah, yeah. I *know*." he said, tone clipped. As he spoke, he put on a sarcastic drawl without meaning to. "'They shouldn't hurt you.' 'You should tell someone.' 'They have no right to do this.' 'It's not normal.' Hate to tell you this, bud, but this *is* normal."

"Well it *shouldn't be!*" Toshinori snarled.

Well, that was quick. A shiver went up Hawks's spine but he held his ground. "It *is*. That's how it's always been." He tried to force his feathers to relax but did not manage it. Stupid bird qualities. No wonder the Commission disliked them. "Look, sorry for being snippy the first we meet but I've had this argument before and I'm not in the mood. Long argument short: This *is* my normal, and what happened is over. Nothing can be done about it. I just have to move on and be grateful I'm out."

"You don't have to live like this." Toshinori pressed. "We can help you."

Miruko and Mockingjay said that too. They just didn't *get it*.

Hawks shook his head. "I don't need help. You should help—" He remembered the Commission's threat and his throat closed up before he could mention Shoto. He cleared it. "You shouldn't waste your time or resources."

Toshinori deflated. "Is that how you see it?" He asked faintly.

Hawks shifted his weight. Yes, he was used to this kind of conversation, but hearing the other party's sorrow— as misplaced as it was— didn't make him feel any less guilty. "I'm a Hero. I don't need to be rescued."

"Is that what you've been told?"

Hawks's lips pressed thin. "Do you always respond with questions?"

Toshinori raised his hands peacefully. "I apologize."

"Mm." Hawks grunted. He glanced at the clock. "Shouldn't you be at work?"

"Yes." Toshinori scratched his cheek awkwardly. "I'll come up with an excuse."

"Don't tell All Might about the Commission." Hawks had meant to ease into that request. Instead he blurted it with no way to take it back. He hoped it sounded less like a plea than it did in his own ears.

Toshinori went silent.

"Don't tell him." Hawks repeated steadily.

Toshinori did not reply.

"Please." Hawks whispered.

Blue eyes locked into gold. "He already knows."

Hawks could not describe the rush of emotions that churned in his stomach and made him want to throw up. The only one he could even hope to identify was panic. He swallowed it.

"This is ridiculous. You can't do anything. You're all so— *so*—You know what?" He threw his hands up in the air. "*Whatever*. Sure, go ahead and waste his time over nothing! I don't care."

He thought he made it clear this discussion was over but Toshinori did not listen.

"If Eri begged you not to try to bring her abusers to justice, would you listen?" he snapped.

Hawks's wings fluffed up in anger and he stormed out of the bathroom. To his frustration, Toshinori followed him, forcing him to respond.

"That's *different*. The Commission is a necessary pillar of Hero Society, not a crime organization. And they're *not* abusing me. I'm an adult."

"You—" Toshinori's gaunt face twisted but he released his breath in a huff. "I apologize for raising my voice. We don't need to discuss this now."

"Yeah..." Hawks took a calming breath of his own and his smile became more wane. "It'd suck if our first face-to-face talk was all arguing." He looked at the clock again. "Though I

guess that's unavoidable. You are now *super* late."

"I'll make it up to you later." Toshinori promised.

"You're going to send me baby animal videos again, aren't you?" Hawks predicted.

"...They're cute." Toshinori mumbled.

It was almost hilarious that the seven foot tall man squealed about kittens. Hawks only knew that little habit because Toshinori sent him a video of a father cat desperately trying to keep a litter of tiny kittens in one place instead of sending it to his coworker. No wonder the voices looked at him and saw a huge walking teddy bear.

"Yeah, they're adorable." Hawks agreed. "Promise you'll send me a bunch with baby birds. And don't tell Miruko. She'll ruin them all with drawn-in circles and texts saying 'Look, it's you.'"

"I swear on my honor she'll never know about our dealings." Toshinori said solemnly. His sunken eyes glinted with mirth.

"Ahem."

They both looked at Mockingjay, who stared back with a raised eyebrow.

Hawks grinned and waved. "Hi, Katniss! How long have you been there?"

"Long enough." she said dryly.

"Do you want me to send you those videos?" Hawks asked.

"Hmm."

Hawks translated the Mockingjay-speak. "I will if you promise not to tell Miruko. She'll tort — tease me with horrible puns."

Mockingjay rolled her eyes but held out a hand. He reached out to shake on it and winced as one of his injuries pulled. Mockingjay's lips thinned and Toshinori's fist clenched but neither brought up the Commission again. That was a good thing because Hawks might lose his temper and scream at them if they did. Or he might cry— No, he would *not* cry. Crying helped no one and solved nothing.

"*You are not dealing with this."* Purple mentioned.

Trust me, I am. You'll notice when I'm really 'not dealing' and you will not like the results. I've been trained. I've been through this before. I'll be fine.

"*I'm not sure about that..."* Yellow whispered.

Hawks ignored him. He and Mockingjay bade goodbye to Toshinori. He wished the secretary could stay longer but Hero duty came first. Except for Mockingjay, who he turned to as soon

as Toshinori left.

"So since I'm technically your boss, would you like to tell me why *you* aren't at work yet?"

"I wasn't leaving you alone with him." she stated.

Hawks may feel offended on Toshinori's behalf but he knew Mockingjay would be this overly cautious with everyone, even Miruko.

Speak of the devil…

The sound of creaking hinges was the only warning he got before Miruko latched onto him the moment the door was open enough for her to step through. The feeling of muscled arms closing around him sent a brief bolt of panic through his veins before he took in the scent of Miruko's shampoo and instinctively relaxed.

Hawks's arms flailed vaguely before he instinctively hugged her back. Her embrace was too gentle— *oh dear*— she was shaking— *oh boy*— and he heard her teeth audibly clench in rage—*Annnd this was bad.* Hawks smiled uncertainly as he tried to figure out how to approach this delicately and without causing a national incident.

"…Hi."

Wow. He was truly the best at emotions and speaking and things. The depths of his charisma and ability to verbally defuse a situation astounded even himself. Good job, Hawks. Well done. Congrats.

Miruko did not explode even though Hawks knew she wanted to. Instead she kept hugging him.

"Jeanist talked to me." she said briefly and Hawks flinched. She let him go and cupped his bruised cheeks with her hands, making him look her in the eye. "You *don't* need to worry about me, understand?"

"Just like you won't worry about me, right?" Hawks asked, voice tainted with tired sarcasm. "They didn't just do this to teach me *my* place, did they? What did you do?"

Her already harsh expression closed off.

"You don't have to tell me." Hawks assured her. "But if you think what you're doing is right, keep doing it."

"I will if you do." Miruko challenged.

Hawks bit his lip. He ducked his head to hide the lower part of his face in his collar. "You'd probably have an easier time investigating things than I would. I'm pretty sure they're watching me at my Agency."

"So you expect me to put you at risk when you don't want me to be at risk?" Miruko asked coolly.

"Yes, because I'm a h-hypocrite." Hawks said scathingly. Why did his voice have to shake then? He needed to sound snappish, not on the verge of bursting into tears like a child. "They could *ruin* you, Rumi. You could lose everything you've ever worked for."

"And you could lose *your life*." Miruko snapped.

"They won't kill me." Hawks stated. He saw Mockingjay's fingers twitch as her expression grew stony. "And they won't throw me at something to be killed. Not as long as I'm useful."

Miruko's expression twisted into a snarl. It abruptly smoothed out. "Fine. We'll both be good little Heroes for a while."

Hawks eyed her suspiciously. "That does not sound like the Miruko I know."

She ignored him. "But not today. Today you are taking the day off. So am I because I'm making sure you *stay put*."

"I need to work." Hawks protested, stomach twisting as he thought about all the work dealing with the Shie Hassaikai he would not be doing and the people he would not be helping because he was being lazy and—

Her expression darkened. "No."

"But Ru—"

"*No*." It took visible effort for her to stop glowering. Her smile was more fake than any he had seen before. "But we don't have to talk about that now. We have to get ready for tonight."

Hawks blinked. "Tonight? Oh right. The movie."

"Yeah. We're seeing that robot whatever sequel." Miruko said brightly. "I hope it's awful so I can roast it without Ingenium giving me the evil eye."

He could tell part of her cheer was forced.

He could tell she wanted to talk about the Commission and curse them all while declaring they could burn in hell.

She didn't only because she knew it would upset him.

He did not have the heart to call her out on it.

XXXXXXX

Taking a day off was stressful.

If Miruko was not there, Hawks was sure he'd work himself into a panic and begin yanking out feathers by hour three. He could not help it. Time off was exactly that— *lazy lazy selfish lazy you're so selfish ungrateful how can you not work when people need help and are dying you selfish brat?*— and it gave Hawks plenty of time to think about *things*.

Things like what happened with the Commission and All Might possibly knowing about the Commission and Mockingjay definitely knowing about the Commission and the threat to Miruko from the Commission and Miruko's anger at the Commission and how the Commission would react if they found out he was being a lazy and ungrateful brat by not doing Hero work as he was trained to because he wasn't on death's door or anything so why the hell was he taking time off—

Hawks grabbed a pillow and locked himself in the bathroom for twenty minutes. He spent those twenty minutes laying on the floor, hugging the pillow, and trying to remember how to breathe. He heard Miruko outside but knew she would only come in if he started hyperventilating. It was an old and standard procedure from when he first started out as an over-worked, exhausted, stressed rookie Pro Hero, but he had not been this bad in years.

His latest visit to the Commission *may* have something to do with it.

A new feature to his old routine was the voices' presence. Hawks could not say it was a bad addition. They spent the time telling him funny stories about their time at UA, keeping it vague enough that he likely would be unable to use them to identify any of the voices he still did not know. Many involved Aizawa and his eternal headache due to his problem children.

Listening to them, eventually Hawks's anxiety gave up and allowed him to relax.

He emerged from the bathroom like nothing had occurred and he and Miruko spent the rest of the day picking out outfits. It was fun to dress up to go incognito when it wasn't for a mission.

They spent hours putting together both mundane and ridiculous outfits and laughing at each other. Hawks almost passed out from laughter when Miruko emerged in a cliché magician's outfit… and clashing polka-dotted clown shoes. He watched her prance around and laid on the couch so he would not fall over, unable to muffle his giggles. Miruko threw a shoe at him so he got up and got some implausible outfits for himself. The styles he and Miruko chose would make Jeanist faint from pure horror.

As evening drew closer, the two became more serious in their choices. Miruko decided on a simple lilac sweater and jeans along with a slouchy beanie. She tucked her ears inside the hat and the remaining lumps from them made it seem like she had small horns on top of her head.

Hawks considered his own outfit a bit longer since he had to worry about his wings. He could feel Red and Pink's attention lingering longingly on a few of Miruko's prettier clothes but gave them a wide berth. He planned to cover his lower face, and even without that covering, he knew unsavory types may think he was female if they saw his *pretty* features, especially since he wasn't growing facial hair anymore. That was an experience he did not want to deal with again today.

Hawks chose a plain blue outfit consisting of a hoodie and ratty jeans. His long sleeve shirt had All Might's smiling face on it with an obligatory "I am here!" written in a speech bubble. Green mumbled that he had that shirt. Orange refused to admit the same but they all knew he did. Hawks simply hid his feathers in his clothes by covering his unexposed skin with them

under the fabric. He also put some in his hair with a blue bandanna over it to make it seem like he had a more expansive feather mutation. He also put on a blue mask that covered the lower part of his face.

That done, he struck a pose. "How do I look?"

"You look like the world's most friendly ninja, Ninja Might." Miruko said, straight-faced. "What, are you starring in the next knockoff martial arts blockbuster?"

"Don't let Edgeshot hear you say that about ninjas." Hawks teased. He summoned a feather to his hand and held it up over his eyebrow. "What do you think? Should I *feather* my eyebrows?"

"That was *painful*. And that's coming from me."

Hawks stared at her unrepentantly as he attached the feathers so they stuck up like All Might's hair. He continued to stare at her, unblinking as he waited for her to react. She did not disappoint.

Miruko lowered her face into her hand. "You're such a *dork*."

Hawks laughed and removed the feathers, hiding them up his sleeve. "If we're caught, I should pretend to be my evil twin, Skwah. The internet's already convinced he exists."

"Ooo, I want an evil twin too. That sounds like so much fun!" Miruko said with exaggerated enthusiasm.

"Hey, no plagiarizing! Get your own crackpot theory." Hawks sniffed.

There was a polite knock on the door. Miruko loudly complained about her lack of an evil twin as she went to answer it. Hawks had to wonder what the neighbors were thinking.

"*Won't people think it's strange you're wearing a mask?"* Purple asked after she left.

Not really. I hate to break it to you but some people wear masks all the time. Mostly because someone thought their mutation looked scary.

"*We knew someone like that."* Yellow said sadly. *"A little girl saw his face and cried so he wore a mask ever since."*

Hawks grimaced. *That's rough.*

Miruko bolted back into the room, eyes round. "Hawks."

"Yes?"

"Hawks."

"That's the name they gave me. Don't wear it out it's all I have."

"Hawks, Jeanist is wearing *black leather*."

"No way."

"*Yes* way."

"Please tell me it's the full outfit."

"It is. He even has *spikes* everywhere. He looks like a cliché delinquent. And you can see his *mouth*."

"...I need a picture."

"I tried to sneak one but he took my phone. *Jerk*."

Hawks grabbed his phone with a feather and sent it zooming out. Threads snagged it before he could take a photo and retreat. He stalked out of the apartment door to sulk at Jeanist, who held his phone between two fingers.

"Hello, *thief*." he sniffed.

Jeanist looked skyward for patience and handed Hawks his phone back. His appearance was as hilarious as Hawks hoped. He took edgy and added another layer of edge. Most of the voices burst out laughing, while Orange cursed 'fucking fashionista hypocrites' at the top of his lungs.

If Hawks weren't paying attention, he might not have noticed Pink and Yellow had retreated.

He frowned. *Is everything okay in there?*

"*They're fine."* Green claimed. *"Let's just enjoy the night, okay?"*

Hawks frowned but got no response when he prodded.

They piled into Ingenium's car. Tensei was dressed up the least since he was the least distinctive— and most covered during Hero work thanks to his armor— of their group, settling for a simple t-shirt and casual pair of jeans. Hawks had to struggle not to smile as Silver's pure joy at seeing his older brother up and about crept up on him.

Miruko called shotgun so Hawks and Jeanist took the back seats. No fans swarmed them when they arrived at the movie theater so apparently their disguises were working.

They got into the theater just in time for the previews, and Miruko spent the whole time tapping her foot and grumbling about there being too many. Luckily the movie started before she could get too annoyed with the repetitive '*bwoooom*' sounds the previews all used.

The movie started, and Hawks admitted it was pretty good. Some of the cornier lines were giggle-worthy, but the acting, computer-generated— or possibly Quirk-generated— effects, and even the plotlines were decent.

Orange's commentary made it even better as he took personal offense to the action scenes.

"Those explosions are so damn annoying!"

"*Look at them! They're fucking **green** and shit."*

"*Who the hell came up with this 'hide behind a damn wooden desk and survive an explosion' shit?"*

"*That asshole would be dead. So would that asshole. Dead. Blown to bits. Oh, look. There's **another** dead asshole!"*

"*YOU CAN'T WALK AWAY FROM AN EXPLOSION LIKE THAT! AAAAARRRRGGGGHHHH **THIS IS SO STUPID!**"*

It took every ounce of control Hawks had not to laugh at inappropriate moments and get his group kicked out.

XXXXXXX

The movie ran longer than they thought it would. By the time they emerged after the after-credits sequence, most of the restaurants were closed. They debated on what to do until Tensei brought up a nightclub.

Hawks would like to deny his body seized up but he pushed past it. He wouldn't drink and no one he was with was the type to try to make him. That was even if they went. Jeanist did not seem like someone who went to nightclubs.

Hawks was immediately proven wrong when Jeanist did not reject the idea.

"We may be in 'disguises' but I trust we will all have control." he said.

"Just say you're talking to me, asshole." Miruko huffed.

Jeanist blinked benignly at her.

"Asshole." Miruko repeated. She tucked a loose piece of hair under her cap and glanced at Hawks. "What do you want to do?"

The smile he gave her was genuine. "Sure, we can go. Why not? We can celebrate your promotion to Number Five."

The nightclub they went too was not seedy, but it was not a shining beacon of peaceful and upstanding society either. Music blasted, lights pulsed, people danced and made fools of themselves, others drank and made even bigger fools of themselves, a shady guy in the corner was probably selling something, and so on. All in all, the disguised Heroes should fit right in. As he walked into the establishment, Hawks glanced left and saw Miruko was watching him carefully.

"What do you think?" she asked.

'*Do you want to be here?'* he knew she meant.

Hawks smiled. "Looks fun. Don't end up on the front page of the tabloids."

She stuck her tongue out at him. They got a table to themselves and Hawks was pleased to see they had a special on chicken wings. They chatted about the movie as they waited for their orders, which came surprisingly quickly considering how full the place was.

The wings were pretty good. Hawks nibbled on a few as he watched Miruko try to goad Jeanist and Tensei into a drinking contest. To Hawks and the voices' surprise, Jeanist accepted.

*"Jeanist **drinks**?"* Orange spluttered. *"What screwed up reality is this?"*

Hawks watched them line up shots and shifted, studying Miruko's face. She seemed happy and content, so that meant she would be a bubbly chatterbox when drunk today. He knew from experience that she only became an angry drunk when she was already furious about something.

"Are you sure this is a good idea, Rumi?" he cautioned anyway. "You know how you get when you're drunk."

"*Maybe* I get a little chatty and dumb." she said, eyes never leaving Jeanist. "But I never go back on a challenge."

"*You're* the one who *instigated* the challenge." Hawks reminded her.

"Exactly."

Hawks looked to Tensei for someone sane in this strange world and he only shrugged. Knowing he needed to warn the man of what was coming, Hawks leaned close.

"Be prepared for a *very* talkative and cuddly Rumi. She will find you, and she will hug you. You'll probably want some ear plugs."

"I heard that." Miruko growled.

She and Jeanist began. Tensei kept track while Hawks watched their drinks like… well, a hawk. As Miruko grew more and more growly while Jeanist remained composed, he felt himself relax as amusement took over. Although he'd rather not smell the alcohol on her breath, he looked forward to her inevitable statements of the obvious.

So Hawks leaned back and enjoyed his chicken wings. It was nice to be able to sit in a crowd without being recognized. He would do it more often if hiding his wings were easier. He knew his feathers were under his clothes but he still felt vulnerable without them on his back.

He finished his chicken wings as Miruko started faltering. Jeanist looked as fresh as a spring daisy but she was starting to struggle. He should probably stop her but Miruko was an adult and could make her own stupid decisions. Plus she'd growl at him if he tried to interfere.

Hawks contemplated his bone-filled bowl and wondered if he could get another one. He glanced around for a waiter and, seeing none, looked towards the bar. It was a square in the center of the establishment and he wrinkled his nose at the thought of pushing through all those people to reach it.

Rumi and Jeanist took another shot.

Tensei watched them as he sipped what he claimed was a plain soda.

Music pulsed.

Lights flickered, illuminating the crowds..

A man was sitting at the bar, hunched over a drink with his front towards Hawks.

The first thing Hawks noticed about him was the vertical scar on his forehead.

His fingertips felt cold and his vision wavered in the bright, flashing lights.

Jeanist stared at him coldly, severe and icy-eyed even in his strange clothes. "*Do you understand what you have **done**?*"

Hawks flinched.

He blinked and Jeanist was still drinking with Miruko.

He could not breathe.

The lights were too bright, the people too close, the music too loud.

He stood abruptly, barely hearing Tensei's worried inquiry if he was okay.

"Fine." he gasped. "Need air."

He stumbled outside even as the logical part of him screamed that was an extremely stupid thing to do. He did not understand. Nothing was wrong, everything was okay, why couldn't he *breathe*? Were the voices speaking he couldn't tell it was just like in the forest again where were the walls and the safeguards and *why was everything his fault—?*

Hawks yanked his mask down to try to breathe easier but it didn't help. He clutched at his head and slid down the wall, shaking violently as he struggled for breath. He was going to pass out or drift. In the middle of an alleyway. At night. *Alone*.

Not now. Not now. ***Not—***

Something was wrapped around his head.

Hawks, with all his speed, could do little more than flinch before hands retracted, leaving… cloth tied around his head above his eyebrows?

He looked at the owner of said hands and nearly passed out as the voices' alarm slammed into him. From the outside, he merely looked at the newcomer in vague confusion even as his inner thoughts literally screamed in panic.

Jin Bubaigawara looked back at him, hands moving uncertainly in front of him as if he were unsure what to do with them.

"You… were splitting apart." he said haltingly.

Hawks stared at him speechlessly, too stunned to move. He wondered why Twice was out in the open before recalling he wasn't a known member of the League yet. He forced his heartbeat to slow. Now was not the time to panic like a rookie who had never seen a Villain before.

Danger level?

"Not much in this instance." Green said rapidly. *"He does not seem to recognize you. Twice was never the sadistic type and was a member that* ***gained*** *the will to kill. He does it only for the League, who he sees as the only people who accepted him."*

Hawks continued to stare unblinkingly at Twice and belatedly realized he should probably respond to him.

"Thank you." he forced himself to say.

Twice blinked and blatant surprise flashed across his face. He slowly sat next to Hawks, and the Hero went through all the ways he could take him down from such a vulnerable position. He did not act yet, in part because the voices were not screaming at him too. They should arrest Twice here and now before he caused any damage. But…

"Did you have too much to drink?" Twice asked.

Hawks shook his head. "I don't drink. Alcoholic parents discouraged me." He smiled cheerfully. "Booze was always more important than I was."

A part of him that was possibly the voices was freaking out. He was having a normal— albeit unexpected— conversation with a Villain. But *was* Twice a Villain yet? Or a member of the League for that matter? Hawks had no clue, and the voices were clueless as well. The thought of trying to arrest him now felt *wrong* since they had no reason to except for future crimes that had not been committed yet, or by this Twice.

Think we can reform him? was Hawks first thought.

The voices' surprise— and in some cases, anger— rippled through him. Hawks repressed a flinch.

"Are you still so stupid you still want to help Villains? Do you still have your selfish ideas to save them? Villains are the enemy of Society. Good Heroes do not grant an enemy mercy!"

"***Excuse** me?"* Orange spluttered, yanking Hawks out of his panic.

Hawks forced himself to breathe. *You heard me. You just said he's not a sadist-type Villain. He wants acceptance, not to burn everything down. Could mental health care help? Or a reinta— a-a rei-intag-gra—* Hawks's throat closed like hands had physically clenched around his throat and he couldn't get enough air into his lungs. *A Quirk help program? And I'm not talking about that disgusting 'Quirk Therapy'.*

"*I don't know."* Green said doubtfully. *"He might not want that help. He might not want to change. He knows he will not be accepted into normal society as it and he are now. The League is the only place he can be himself."*

"*But he's also not a 'let's kill everyone for the fun of it' type."* Purple added. His cautious mood soured into something darker. *"Or he never got the chance to become one."*

What do you mean?

"*He died shortly after..."* Purple paused. *"...shortly after things started going downhill. We think Miruko killed him. She vanished around the time he did."*

Hawks shivered at the thought of his best friend's possible death. *It won't happen again*.

He blinked, realized he had drifted, and recalled he was sitting next to a Villain. Or would-be Villain. He would like to claim he did not recoil and avert his gaze but that would be a big fat lie.

*Guys, we are doing **great** at the not-freaking-out. Let's keep that up.*

"Sorry." Hawks said, *apologizing* to a Villain who possibly joined a group *that screwed over the entire world*. "I sink into my head sometimes."

"It's okay." Twice said. He had a surprisingly soft voice. "Your head can be a scary place."

Hawks muffled a sardonic laugh. "Yeah. PTSD is awful." He twitched. "Not that I have it. I mean, I might. But I don't! Because I haven't been diagnosed… So I don't have it."

Purple? I'm being an idiot again. Please make me shut up.

"*I don't think I should."* Purple murmured. He sounded fascinated. "*We can **use** this. We can use this to—"*

"***No."***

Hawks flinched, because he had never heard Pink sound that angry before. Her next statement sent a shiver up his spine.

"*We are not having Hawks infiltrate the League. **Never**."*

When Hawks focused Twice was still with him, which was more than what most strangers would do. It made the voices reel as they tried to fit this man with the villain who brought

about the end of their world.

Hawks eventually untied the over-shirt from around his head and handed it back to Twice, who accepted it.

He did not know what to say.

He did not know what to do.

So he sat in silence that was disturbingly calm and tried to breathe as a stranger— a *villain*— sat next to him in equally silent support.

Asking for nothing.

Demanding nothing.

Merely being *there*.

It was more than anyone at the Commission had ever done for him. So pardon Hawks for being a *little* off his game.

Eventually Hawks found his voice. "I—"

The club door opened. Tensei stepped out, face taut with worry, and his eyes narrowed as he spotted Twice. The smile he put on was polite but strained.

"You've been out here for ten minutes. I think even Ru noticed you were gone." he casually walked over, hands in his pockets, and Hawks wondered if he had one around his phone to send an alarm to the others. "Everything okay?"

"I'm fine." Hawks glanced at Twice as his stomach twisted into knots. Would Ingenium realize who he was? "Just needed some air."

"*The Heroes did not find out who the League of Villains were until after the training camp."* Silver reassured him.

So what if Tensei connects Twice to me later?

Silver had no response to that.

A hand touched Hawks's shoulder and he flinched. He saw Tensei pull back and hastily stood up, glancing at Twice. "Thanks for staying with me, mister."

"I..." Twice's icy blue eyes flicked from him to Tensei. They paused on Hawks. He studied his face and they widened slightly. *Crap*, had Twice recognized him? "Of course." he said gruffly. "It was no problem. Since your friend is here, I suppose I can go."

He waved vaguely and wandered off like a stranger was wont to do after helping another stranger.

Hawks watched him go without even trying to stop him.

He and the voices wondered if they had made a huge mistake.

"Want to go home?" Tensei asked quietly.

Hawks nodded.

He followed Tensei back into the club to pick up a perfectly poised Jeanist and drunk Miruko. Tensei drove to Hawks's relief since he did not trust himself not to drift on the road. They arrived at Miruko's apartment building and Hawks was tasked with dragging her drunken rabbit tail inside. Tensei offered to help but he declined.

"I can always pick her up with my feathers."

"They're soft and fluffy!" Miruko slurred. "Like a baby chick's." She poked his wing, became fascinated with them, and kept doing it. It was like being poked in the side of the head. Annoying, but bearable. Unfortunately, she decided hugging him and rubbing his cheek with hers was a good idea too. "Baaaaaby Bird! Fluff fluff fluff!"

Hawks sighed.

He waved goodbye to Tensei and Jeanist and began herding Miruko towards the door. Whoever came up with the phrase 'herding cats' had never tried to herd rabbits before because she somehow managed to wander off more than a two year-old. She talked at everything too. Him, a tree, a piece of litter, the moon. Specifically she whined the moon was too bright and was looking for its off switch.

It's official. I am never letting her try to drink Jeanist under the table again.

He followed Miruko as she wandered around and assaulted some poor shrubbery.

She randomly stopped, looked at him, laughed maniacally, and kept wandering.

"*The fuck."* was Orange's eloquent response.

"*I am so confused."* Red said flatly.

Join the club.

Miruko ceased in her endeavor to pick all the leaves off a miserable-looking plant and abruptly turned to him, slinging an arm across his shoulders. She frowned.

"Are you okay?" she slurred. "You've been reaaaaaaaally quiet."

"Well you've been reaaaaaaaally talkative." Hawks pointed out dryly.

She squinted at him and nodded slowly in agreement. "It's true. But ya know what else is true?"

Hawks sighed and braced himself for a long-winded rant about something inane.

"You're scared. You're still upset about what those assholes did to you." His spine went rigid. Rumi did not seem to notice. She flailed at the air a few times before her hand successfully landed on his head. "I know you're scared but I'll keep you safe." She patted his head and scowled. "I'm doing an awful job."

Hawks did not reply at first. He knew Miruko would not remember this conversation tomorrow. Yet he couldn't let that statement stand. "You're doing great. More than I deserve."

Her scowl deepened. "You deserve better than those shitheads at the Commission."

Hawks grimaced. "We are *not* having this conversation now while you're drunk."

"Fiiiiiine." Miruko whined.

She then proceeded to vomit on the sidewalk.

XXXXXXX

Hawks sat at an unfamiliar table with cooling coffee in front of him, watching the cream-filled liquid quiver. He refused to lift his gaze from it, focused on keeping his one hand curled around the handle of the mug.

Best Jeanist sat in front of him. His hair was dyed black and styled into rebellious spikes and his clothes were dark but Hawks doubted the shadows under his eyes were from eyeliner. Seeing Jeanist like this should be funny. It wasn't. He stared at his mug as Jeanist stared at him. A clock ticked on the wall, counting the seconds of heavy silence as they passed.

Tick tick tick.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" Jeanist asked.

Hawks sank in his seat and heard Kaminari slide down too, both of them trying to make themselves as small as they felt. Neither of them looked up at the Fiber Hero.

"This is why we have rules." Jeanist stated. "This is why we have regulations. A Hero inside the Paranormal Liberation Front is now *in mortal danger* because of your actions."

Hawks could not speak. Her eyes filled with tears but she didn't let them fall.

"We just wanted to help." Kaminari whispered.

"You *didn't* help." Jeanist said flatly. "*Nothing* you did helped." There was no malice as he stated the facts. His fingers clenched. "*Why* did you think finding me would benefit anyone?"

She finally dared to look up. "Bakugo—"

"—did not need to be assured of my status." Jeanist stated. "He was my intern for a *week*, and that is all. But you did not care about that, did you? You had to keep digging and see for

yourselves. Because you did not trust the Pros to investigate, Shigaraki now knows I am alive. He knows Hawks and I conspired to fake my death. We haven't heard from Hawks in weeks. It's certain he has been captured by the Villains."

She began to shake. She heard Kaminari's breath hitch and her own eyes stung.

"I-I…"

What could she say to defend herself? *Nothing*, because she'd been reckless, nosy, and *stupid*. What had started as a suspicious conversation she and Kaminari overheard involving Tokoyami and Hawks had turned into a web of conspiracies and rumors-turned-fact. It was not just her and Kaminari. Half of Class 1-A had been involved in investigating Best Jeanist's disappearance after the teachers bluntly and specifically told them *not* to get involved. But *they* were the two that started it all, and *kept* pushing even when others thought they should stop.

None of them expected to uncover that Hawks was working as a double agent for the Heroes. None of them expected that fact to get to the wrong person. What was unearthed could not be shoved back into the shadows, and it was Hawks— a Pro Hero working for the good guys and now *exposed as a genuine Hero* to the PLA— who paid the price for their hubris.

"If we did not need as many Heroes as possible for the upcoming crisis, you and everyone involved in this 'investigation' would get your Hero licenses *revoked*." Jeanist stated. "You would have also gone to *court* for accessing confidential files under false pretenses."

His expression was cold, grave and completely unsympathetic. She wondered if that was why Aizawa-sensei was not the one facing them now. Was he blaming himself for not doing more to dissuade them? Abruptly Jeanist slammed his hands down on the tabletop, making her and Kaminari jump.

"Do you understand what you have *DONE?!*" he repeated, shouting this time. "What you may have cost—"

A phone bleeped.

Jeanist fished it out of his pocket and looked at the message. His eyes went wide and he spun away from them, turning on the television. The image came into focus and she clapped a hand over her mouth so she would not scream.

Hawks's bloody face was plastered on the screen, gripped firmly in Shigaraki's grasp.

The Villain grinned at the camera, chapped lips stretching unpleasantly. "That's right, wonderful viewers: The Heroes became so *desperate* to stop us they sent their Number Two to spy on us. They became so *terrified* they were willing to throw their second-best to the wolves. He did such a good job too. Too bad his 'allies' betrayed him." Shigaraki's grin widened so much his lips cracked and bled. "I and my fellow Liberators send our personal thanks to Ochaco Uraraka and Denki Kaminari of UA's infamous Class 1-A. We *never* would have found this little spy without you."

He shoved Hawks downward, revealing his bare back, and two long, bleeding cuts where there had once been wings—

Twenty-two year-old— *not-tortured-not-bleeding-not-wingless*— Hawks's eyes slid open.

He stared at the ceiling as they prickled with unshod tears. *Pink?*

"I'm sorry." She— *Ochaco Uraraka*— sobbed. *"I'm so sorry."*

Hawks swallowed. *Yellow, you…?*

Yellow— *Denki Kaminari*— said nothing but his anguish ripped Hawks's heart apart.

The two fled into the depths of his mind and the rest followed, but Hawks still felt their guilt.

None of the voices spoke to him for the rest of the night, no matter how much he called for them.

Chapter End Notes

And now a story to ruin the mood: Drunk Miruko is based off of an event when my cousin slept over. She was not drunk, but she was either extremely tired or possibly sleepwalking? I woke up to find her wandering around pulling leaves off our house plants and when she looked at me, she literally laughed evilly. Like a full-on cackle. Then she went to the couch, laid down, and apparently fell asleep. I'm sure my expression of "What the Hell?" must have been legendary.

Different Perspectives

The President of the Hero Public Safety Commission drummed her fingers on her desk as she watched the footage of Hawks's interrogation again. She observed as Hawks emerged from the interrogation room, and followed its path outside to the lobby. Her lip curled at the pathetic display as Hawks's was guided to Detective Tsukauchi's car. *Guided*. If Pathfinder and Amplifier's touch was enough to leave it shaken, the Icarus Project had failed worse than they could believe.

Hawks disobeyed protocol, spoke back to her, and tried to tell her what she should and should not do. The *nerve*. The Icarus Project was a Hero, yet it acted like its feelings mattered. They did not. Heroes smiled through the worst of pain. They did not *tremble* and lean on another Hero for support.

These little rebellions were getting out of hand. If other agents acted as the Icarus Project had, they would be sent for remedial courses immediately. It was unfortunate Hawks was so weak in body and mind. If they tore off the unsightly and unnecessary pieces and forcefully forged the Icarus Project into the Hero it should be, it would break completely during the remedial course procedure. And the smiles of broken dolls looked damaged no matter how skillfully the artist painted it. She had learned that from her last attempt to squash the rebelliousness from it.

The thought of an imperfect investment rankled at the President but unfortunately Hawks was not All Might. The Icarus Project was loud, rude, lazy, confrontational, and could not keep its disrespectful mouth shut. The program to create perfect Heroes did not allow for trial runs so they were stuck with indolent, ungrateful gutter trash after nearly twenty years of work.

At least she could console herself that it was not a complete waste of resources. Despite its flaws, Hawks knew its place, having learned that at sixteen after it thought it could poke its nose into business it had no place in. There had been a close call— her agents had miscalculated how badly the Icarus Project would respond— but the end result had been worth it. If the Commission said "jump" it would not need to be told how high. If they ordered it to give its life for the good of the public, it would lay in its own grave.

But even with that extra push that nearly resulted in a corpse instead of a flawed but working product, the Icarus Project was not selfless as Heroes should be. It had the gall to take a day off to watch a *movie*. It showed fear when it should smile to put the public at ease. If they ordered it to kill for the good of Hero Society, it would hesitate. It would not argue directly, but it would try to manipulate them, using the skills *they* gave it to press them into a different way. Did Hawks think they were *fools*?

Apparently reminding it of what happened the last time it stopped being a *good Her*o and tried to rebel was not enough to make it understand it was *their* Hero and would do as the Commission commanded. Unfortunately, taking more drastic measures was now unavoidable. They would have to crack down on it even harder.

Targeting Miruko was a good first step. It was because of her they knew about Hawks's unfounded and ridiculous suspicions. Their listening devices in her apartment had heard as the Icarus Project told her about Endeavor's supposed crimes, and then she had used her Agency's resources to begin looking into the Todorokis. Listening devices placed there failed to function, but the alerts worked well enough and her inquiries immediately informed the Commission of her actions.

As for why they had alerts for such instances, it was for the benefit of the stability of Hero Society to keep an eye on the lives of their topmost Heroes, though the Commission was ignorant to the private life of the Todorokis, of course. They would do the same to All Might if they knew who he was. Just to ensure no one was attempting to slander him.

Miruko had gotten too big for her skintight costume as of late. Ever since Hawks disappeared she grew louder and louder, refusing to stop looking for it even when the Commission considered it irretrievable. And now she had the gall to pry into the private life of the Number Two Hero, Endeavor. Did she think she could simply open an investigation without permission?

She would have to be dealt with, because rules and proper procedure kept their society running and she was dangerously close to breaking them. It was not a simple case of her tragically losing her life in the near-future. If she died in an accident the public would despair. She was brash but popular, and losing one of the Top Ten would not be a good look for Hero Society.

She had a weakness to exploit however. One that belonged to the Commission.

Miruko was truly a fool to look at the Icarus Project and see a person, but they could use that misconception to their advantage.

Unfortunately, they could not track Hawks and Miruko's every movement. It was infuriating that the bugs in Hawks's Agency still refused to function, and no matter what the Commission's hackers and tech experts did, they could not slice into the Agency's cameras. The Icarus Project would not dare to rebel so openly by using a sidekick's Quirk to block their efforts, so the thwarted observers could only offer an accidental firewall as an explanation.

Their incompetence disgusted the President. The problem had persisted for nearly all of the four years the Icarus Project's Commission-granted Agency had been active, yet their agents still could not eliminate it. The closest their best hacker got was the image of a bee, and he admitted it was only because the perpetrator— who they had failed to realize *existed* until that moment— *sent* it to them. Such symbolism matched none of the known hackers in the Commission's database, leaving them with nothing.

The President had the agent and his team sent to remedial courses immediately.

If only dealing with Hawks's own selfishness and failure was so straightforward.

Diverting even more resources to the Icarus Project made the Commission President's lip curl but if Hawks wanted to act like an ungrateful child, it would be treated like one. The Icarus

Project may be trying its hand at rebellion again like a brain-dead chick thought it could fight a wolf, but it had been trained well in one area.

It would not fight the Commission. Nor would it try to tell the public about them. It knew Hero Society relied on absolute belief in the Hero Commission, so it would keep silent no matter what was done to it.

Miruko would know who hurt it, however. And if she had any brains in that empty head of hers, she would know why. If she cast off her arrogance and became a model Hero, problem fixed. If she did not, the Icarus Project would learn *exactly* how much it meant to her and realize her promises were lies. She merely used it to bolster her own popularity and standing. How could it be so stupid that it had blinded itself to that?

The Commission watched the footage again, tapping her fingers on her desktop as her annoyance mounted. Hawks did not smile once as it was aggressively questioned. In fact it had the gall to close its eyes and brace itself. What an *abysmal* display. The Icarus Project could never be what it was created to be. It would never be a Symbol like All Might.

Perhaps they should look to the next generation again. It was a pity many promising Quirks had successfully been accepted into UA and other Hero schools, though a few that did not have combat-oriented Quirks were successfully recruited by the Commission. Bless the entrance exam for being so utterly imbalanced against those whose Quirks were not suited for fighting robots. Though of course, that was how it was designed to be by the Commission, letting powerful Quirks slip through the cracks and into their ranks.

For now, they would sink more time and effort into their unworthy investment and remind it just who had saved it from dying in the gutter it was born in. It did not matter what Hawks wanted. If it had been properly trained, it would not want anything except to use itself to keep Hero Society running and the public safe. The Icarus Project's Quirk, thoughts, and body belonged to the Commission, and the Commission worked only for the good of Hero Society. Hawks would become whatever was needed to keep the people content for generations to come.

It was time Hawks was reminded of that.

The President picked up the phone and made a call to Tartarus, requesting the release of a prisoner.

The Commission-trained warden was all too happy to oblige.

XXXXXXX

Saturday morning came. Miruko was hung over and Hawks was exhausted. He drank some coffee as he headed out and left her regretting her decisions at the counter. One day off he could do but two were too many. Plus, he wanted to be distracted.

I was a spy sent to infiltrate the League of Villains.

I was caught and killed because of it.

I was caught and killed because Pink and Yellow accidentally exposed me.

The voices' evasiveness when it came to his future self's death made all too much sense to him now. Something happened to All Might— the voices insistence he would not last forever made that obvious— so the Commission became desperate to bring the League down. Desperate enough they sent their pet project to die.

It was rather freeing for it to be confirmed just how expendable he really was.

And Hawks *knew* he would die from such a mission. He would be found out, captured, and tortured no matter how things played out. He was good at deception and manipulation, but his better nature would betray him. He would not be able to stand by while innocents got hurt, just like his other self had been unable to stand by in that timeline. Future him and Best Jeanist's plan was proof of that. And it was their plan. The Commission would be willing to sacrifice one of their top Heroes but Hawks wouldn't and couldn't.

And then his deception had been exposed by Pink and Yellow, which led to future him's death.

Pink and Yellow.

Uraraka and Kaminari.

Hawks vaguely remembered them from footage of the Sports Festival but the memories were fuzzy due to his and the voices' lack of control back then. Now his head was silent, with only the occasional bolt of pain to warn him the voices weren't doing so well.

As a result, Hawks was on edge all day as he watched two figurative cars speed towards each other in slow motion and waited for the inevitable crash. By the time he went to visit Eri he was worried he might have another anxiety attack. Hopefully the voices would keep their distance a bit longer.

Aizawa met him in the hallway like usual. His dark eyebrows inched upward. "You look exhausted."

"I haven't slept well in *days*." Hawks said brightly. "Where did you get your caterpillar bag? I want one."

Aizawa slouched with his hands in his pockets. "Can't tell you. My co-worker bought it for me. Besides, I don't think your wings will fit."

Hawks pouted. "Aww." He walked next to Aizawa. "So did I miss anything these past few days?"

"Eri missed you."

Hawks winced and his wings pressed tightly against his back. "I'm sorry. I should have visited yesterday. I have no excuse."

"I think you do." Aizawa said neutrally. "It would not help her feel safe if she saw your bruises." Dark eyes flicked to Hawks's stiff expression before returning to the hall ahead. "Toshinori told me what happened."

Hawks's entire body seized up. '*When did Toshinori meet with you?'* he did not ask, knowing better than to think he could. "Toshinori does not understand the full situation." He said instead, tone clipped. "I assure you that I am perfectly fine and capable of returning to work. These injuries will not affect my performance."

Sharp black eyes never strayed from him. "Of course. I didn't mean to imply you weren't capable."

Hawks had a suspicious feeling Aizawa was only agreeing with him to soothe him. He rankled at the condescending response but let it go. He knew Toshinori and Aizawa were overreacting. They just didn't know any better. This was nothing new.

Hawks felt some of his stress fade away when he opened Eri's door to find her surrounded by stuffed animals. Her room was much less empty now. Aizawa had brought over some toys and books for her, filling the white room with colors. Hawks had gotten her a couple playthings as well, though he counted every cent and tried not to think about the upcoming bill he was unlikely to be able to pay.

Eri's face *lit up* when she saw him. The lines of worry that should not be present on such a young face faded and she rushed up to him. For a moment, he thought she was going to throw her arms around him but she stopped at the last second, dithering uncertainly. Hawks smiled, knelt, and opened his arms a bit.

"Miss me?"

She threw herself into his arms and clung to him tightly. "I thought you left." '*I thought you left* ***forever****.'* he knew she meant.

"I did leave for a couple days but I came back." Hawks assured her. "So what have you been up to?"

He listened, not bothering to hold back a smile, as she rambled about what he'd missed.

"*Gold."*

Hawks refrained from jumping. *Hey, Green. You're talking to me again? Not to be rude, but this is not the place to discuss what I saw—*

"*Eri's Quirk might activate."* Green interrupted urgently. *"Her horn's growing which means she's accumulating energy for it. She might have an outburst."*

Hawks glanced at Eri's horn, noting its length. He settled back on his heels and grinned at her. "Do you have any new pictures to show me?"

She instantly rushed to the table to gather the colored pages. With Eri distracted, Hawks leaned over to Aizawa.

"Be ready to use your Quirk." he muttered out of the corner of his mouth. "My gut's telling me she might have an outburst."

Aizawa frowned at him. "What do you mean?"

Hawks bit back some annoyance at the question, knowing he would ask it himself while also hating having to explain. Why could no one just *take his word* for things?

"Her horn has grown." he murmured, nodding at her. "It might indicate something. Just a hunch. And my hunches are usually right just so you know."

Aizawa nodded but Hawks was uncertain how seriously his warning was being taken. He shoved down his annoyance again and ignored the twisting in his gut because if Eraserhead did not take him seriously here, in this instance, how would anyone take him seriously if he revealed he had time travelers in his head?

Eri showed him her latest drawings and he fawned over each of them, grinning from ear to ear as she drew mystical creatures that likely came from her own imagination. Sure, some of them could be mutation Quirks she had glimpsed but he'd like to think Overhaul's abuse had not stolen the childish creativity from her. He noticed she never drew Ennea, however. Not even once in all the hundreds of drawings she created. Did she not want to remind them the vigilante existed and get them into trouble?

Hawks saw Eri's eyes dart to the table and she abruptly removed a couple papers from it, hiding them under the others. She glanced at him again almost guiltily and shoved them more out of sight.

"Eri?" She froze. Hawks kept his voice soft. "Are there a few pictures you don't want to show me?"

She avoided his gaze, twisted her hands, and nodded silently.

"That's okay." Hawks soothed her. "If they're just for you, you don't have to show them to me."

"They're secret." she whispered.

Hawks kept his expression solemn. "Good secret or bad secret?"

"Both." her voice was so quiet it was barely audible.

Aizawa was frowning, and Hawks hoped he was not considering looking at the pictures when Eri was unaware. Hawks would leave him with a feather to call his very own if he did. One that would smack him upside the head until it was destroyed. Eri was not a test subject in a lab. Not all of her actions needed to be scrutinized and not all her secrets exposed. Hawks liked to think Aizawa knew that but honestly, he only had the voices and a few of his own interactions to judge the underground Hero by.

"As long as those secrets won't hurt you, you can keep them if you want." Hawks told her. "It's your choice whether to share them. And you *do not* have to share them if you don't want

to, okay?"

Eri was giving him that look again. That wide-eyed, bewildered stare she always gave him whenever he gave her a choice. Whether it was something minor like "What would you like to do?" or bigger like "Is it okay if the doctor comes check on you?", she always stared at him like she could not believe he was real.

In his darker moments, Hawks wondered if he used to look at Rumi like that. He forced that line of thought away before he could consider it more, because comparing himself to Eri was ludicrous and disrespectful. His past was nowhere near as bad as what she suffered. He probably only compared the two because Toshinori mentioned Eri when they argued.

"I..." Eri looked down and gripped at her dress. "I want to."

"You want to what?" Hawks asked gently.

"I want to share." Eri sounded close to tears as she said it, and her eyes were watery.

She returned to the table on her own and pushed through the drawings until she found the ones she hid. She held them to her chest and stared up at Hawks, gaze darting to Aizawa, and he felt something in his throat tighten. This was not right. If things went well, Aizawa would be her guardian. She should trust and look to him more than Hawks.

Aizawa remained silent, and Hawks realized he was letting him take point to hopefully prevent Eri from shutting down if Eraserhead became involved in the conversation.

"Do you want to share the good or the bad secret first?" Hawks asked.

Eri glanced at the pictures and held out her left hand. It was shaking. Hawks took the drawing and kept his expression composed. A demonic monster with a clearly-defined beak-like mask was scribbled onto the page. Every line was wobbly, as if the hand that drew it had been shaking. The figure's hand was covered in red crayon, which twisted out like something had exploded into a fountain of blood.

"Do you want to tell me who this is?" Hawks asked, even though he already knew. He pointedly did not ask *"Who is this?"* giving her the choice whether to tell.

Eri shook her head violently and clutched the other drawing— the 'good secret' drawing— to her chest like a shield.

"Can Aizawa see it, Starling?" Hawks asked next.

Eri hesitated but nodded.

Hawks passed the picture to Aizawa, who studied it with lips pressed thin. He kept his own expression calm and did *not* think about whether the person being torn apart in the picture was meant to be an unknown person or Eri herself.

"How about the good drawing?"

Eri held it out with both hands and ducked her head. She was less frightened this time and more shy, which was both adorable and a relief.

Hawks took the other drawing and let a smile cross his face. The drawing was of five people, and he could identify a few while inferring who the rest were. His portrait was the most obvious with the large red wings, while the figure with the black bird head was clearly Tokoyami. Shoto was next easiest to identify with his red and white hair, with who was presumably Aizawa dressed in black next to him. That left the other black-haired figure with what seemed to be glasses, so probably Tenya Iida. They were all standing in front of a building that was completely colored blue.

"*Ooo*, a group shot." Hawks crowed. He turned the page and squinted at the background. "Can you tell me what building this is?"

"UA." Eri mumbled. "Fumikage and Tenya told me about it. It's their school."

Hawks had no idea his former interns visited while he was… preoccupied. Though with Aizawa here they had a potentially easy way to get a ride from UA. Good on them. He briefly locked gazes with Aizawa as he asked his next question, searching for any sign that he shouldn't.

"Would you like to visit UA, Starling?"

She held out her hands and he handed the group drawing back. She held it to her chest and rocked on her feet, gaze on the floor.

"Yeah." she mumbled.

Hawks looked again at Aizawa, who sighed and nodded his head. He grinned brightly and clapped his hands together. "Well, you're in luck. You'll be able to visit soon."

Eri blinked at him uncomprehendingly as if getting such a simple wish granted was a foreign concept to her. A doctor came in and she tensed. Hawks considered shooing the man out but he shook his head, lingering near the door.

Aizawa crouched in front of Eri so he was at her level. "You might be going to UA with me in the near future. To live with me. Is that okay with you?"

Eri bit her lip. "Will there be doctors?"

"Only the school nurse." Aizawa said honestly. "She does not hurt people. She kisses wounds better."

Eri considered that as she looked down at her picture of what she imagined UA looked like. She glanced uncertainly at Hawks before looking at Aizawa again. "Hawks is coming too, right?"

Hawks forcibly stopped a sad look from crossing his face. He doubted he could get an excuse to go into UA every day. If he was lucky, he could maybe visit once a month with his busy schedule and security being so tight.

Aizawa hesitated. "He may be able to visit."

Eri went still. Her eyes widened. "'*May*'?"

"I *will* visit." Hawks corrected firmly. "But it won't be every day."

"UA is very far away and Hawks has to stay here." Aizawa explained patiently.

Eri's lip trembled and she bit it harder, eyes watery and distressed. "B-But I—"

A shudder passed through her from her head to her too-thin legs.

Her knees buckled, hitting the floor with sharp, painful thuds.

Her horn glowed and the air around her seemed to *warp* with a strange energy.

The doctor in the doorway gasped and stepped back with the slowness of someone moving through molasses. Was he glowing or was that the trick of the light?

Aizawa's went rigid as his instincts perceived a threat but he did not move as his black-eyed sight instinctively perceived a *terrified child*.

And Hawks lurched forward, reaching out even as someone screamed at him to stop—

Before he could touch Eri, Aizawa's eyes turned red. Her horn stopped glowing and the strange energy faded. The doctor immediately slumped in the doorway. Two nurses rushed in and checked him over. He was breathing heavily but he seemed to be alright.

Eri was frozen, face pale, eyes round, and horn smaller than it had been. Hawks scooped her up and held her in his arms. She seemed too stunned to react and stared past him like he was not there. The voices were clamoring in the back of his mind, cursing themselves for not paying attention, but their urge to comfort and protect only bolstered Hawks's own.

"It's okay." he soothed her as he rocked her back and forth. "You're okay."

The spell of shock cast over her shattered and she burst into tears. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to. Don't send me back. *I'm sorry!*"

Hawks hugged her and wrapped her in his wings as she cried. His comforting murmurs did nothing to stop her sobs and he glanced helplessly at Eraserhead. Aizawa was pale, his red eyes watering as he made sure Eri's Quirk remained suppressed.

"I'll secure her as a ward of UA and myself." was all he said.

"Good." Hawks croaked.

XXXXXXX

Coffee was not a drink that Miruko preferred. She could handle bitter tastes, but plain hot coffee was just one of those drinks she did not seek out for the joy of consumption. She

preferred coffee with so much sugar and creamer it could barely be considered coffee at all. It did not mean she was completely adverse to drinking coffee to give her some energy after a hangover, however, as she begrudgingly acknowledged while chugging down a cup. After having already drunk two. Or five.

"Blargh." Miruko muttered, shoving the latest empty mug aside.

She returned to glowering at the papers on her desk, trying to force her brain to work until a hand invaded her vision and shoved a new one in her face. She placed another sheet on top of her file on the Todorokis, glanced up, and grimaced.

"You got another one for me?"

"No, I merely came over to your office to give random paperwork to you for no reason." Mockingjay said dryly.

Miruko huffed at her. "Be nice, I have a hangover, my tongue feels like sandpaper, and my head is pounding." She took the paper but delayed reading it, keeping it face down on the desk. "How angry is this one going to make me?"

"Very." Mockingjay said flatly.

Miruko looked over the report. She was not one to take deep breaths to calm herself but found herself doing exactly that as she took in the details.

Seven years ago. Family of five. Kids aged twelve, seven, and five. Youngest developed a Quirk that let her project people's crimes like a movie reel when she touched them. She went to a meet and greet with a local Hero and revealed he left his ex's current boyfriend to die in a collapsing building. Only witnesses to the damning projection were the Hero and the family. Family tried to tell the police but had no evidence except for the girl's Quirk.

A gas explosion burned the family's house down two weeks later. All five were confirmed dead, including the girl.

Miruko rubbed her temples as her ears went flat. "What makes you think it was the Commission cleaning up a mess?"

"Other than the fact that the house didn't have a gas line anywhere near it?" Mockingjay asked rhetorically. "A neighbor reported seeing someone following the family after the initial police report was made. Of course, he was 'old', 'senile', and 'paranoid' so his claims were dismissed. He passed away from old age two years ago. And it *was* from old age. I double checked."

Miruko slowly added the new report to the growing pile. "That's how many cases of witnesses *conveniently* dying so far?"

"Seventy-four." Mockingjay said bluntly. "And according to my associate, these are still the most obvious ones. We haven't even gotten to the deaths they really worked to hide."

Miruko did not bother to hide her scowled as she glared at the growing folders. She tried not to do the numbers but her mind betrayed her and did the math. So far there were seventy-four cases of fifty-seven different Heroes having their crimes covered up by the Commission, resulting in the deaths of two hundred and twenty-six innocent people. Of those two hundred and twenty-six, forty were other, less prominent— quote unquote '*less important to Hero Society functioning*'— Heroes and sidekicks. Thirteen were police officers. The rest were civilian deaths.

"Some of these date back to before All Might became a Hero." she growled. "I can't believe they've gotten away with this for so long."

"I can." Mockingjay disagreed. "I've seen this kind of cover-up before. They've gotten away with it because no one thought to look or have their pockets filled with bribes. But we're looking now."

"Yeah." Miruko growled. "Still should have looked sooner."

None of the incidents were from the past two years— Miruko suspected it was because of them being buried extra deeply due to being so recent— but she could not help but think of those she might have been able to help if she'd acted faster. Mockingjay did not argue with her to try to change her mind.

Miruko checked the growing list of incident reports again despite having memorized more than half of them and sighed. "We still don't have enough, do we?"

"Not even close." Mockingjay admitted. "If some bribes are passed around, all of it can be brushed aside as coincidence or even attacks from a mysterious group of Villains 'trying to slander the heroic Commission'."

Miruko shot the pile of reports a disgusted look. "So you're saying that even after almost year we've been— what is the phrase?— 'spinning our wheels' and getting nowhere?"

"Pretty much."

"Damn it." Miruko whispered. "Our evidence is too circumstantial on it's own. The only concrete evidence we have is what happened to Hawks. But even with that, they can still claim denial if Hawks doesn't talk." Miruko shot a glare towards his folder, which was already three times the size of any of the others. She rubbed at her aching forehead. "We need him to come forward to make enough of a public fuss for the ball to get rolling, don't we? He's the most obvious and indisputable case we have."

Mockingjay did not reply. She did not need to.

Miruko grimly sorted through the files to put the latest incident in the correct year. "So what's your excuse to Baby Bird for working with me?"

"I don't have or need one. He doesn't know I've been coming here." Mockingjay admitted. "I always go on missions without Hawks needing to know. However…" She sat on the edge of

Miruko's desk and crossed her arms. "How *do* you plan on telling Hawks about our year-deep investigation into the Commission?"

Miruko looked down at her empty cup as she considered her answer. Hawks was smart and observant, but she knew he had yet to realize she was investigating the Commission— she had been since he'd vanished— and compiling evidence simply because he did not *want* to realize what she was doing behind the scenes. If Miruko had any say, he would remain ignorant. Hawks was a self-sacrificing idiot and he'd take her investigation the wrong way. As in letting the Commission rip his beating heart out of his chest to keep them from harming the few people he had. But what was almost worse than *that* kind of martyr-like selflessness…

"Simple: I'm not going to. Not yet. Cause when Hawks hears about the other people being screwed over by the Commission, he'll rebel in a heartbeat to help them. I want him to fight them for *himself* but we both know he's not capable of doing that yet. He still wants to believe they have a reason to hurt him and he's not ready to see they're abusive monsters clinging to their power. And… I hate to say this about him, but he's *fragile* right now. You've seen it. I've seen it. He's *not* okay no matter how much he insists he's 'fine'. I think if I try to force him to see that truth now… he'll *shatter*. And I can't do that to him." She looked up at Mockingjay and smirked mockingly. It lacked her usual cockiness. "Pretty bad reasoning, right?"

"No." Mockingjay denied. "We both know the Commission conditioned Hawks to be self-sacrificing and stop the injustices others suffer through. If he fights them for other's sake, he's still acting as they ingrained in him and won't see just how genuinely villainous they are. He'll fight to get justice for the victims but not for himself, and that kind of denial won't help anyone. In a case like this, his instinctive defenses of the Commission could let them get away with what they've done because if a noble and 'well-adjusted' Hero that they raised defends them, that must mean they aren't that bad and are being framed, *right*?" Her lips twisted into a scowl. "They'll take any weakness they can to turn things in their favor, and Hawks could be exploited without meaning it. So I'd rather he see the truth fight them for his own sake as well." Her grey gaze hardened to steel. "Otherwise he'll never be free."

Philosophical discussion about the nature of freedom and the fragility of the human mind was not Miruko's thing any more than bad coffee but she had to agree.

"So what now?" Mockingjay asked after a pause. "My associate can keep finding cases and gathering evidence, but until we get someone to force this into the spotlight where it can't be swept under the rug, that's all we can do."

"Then we do exactly that." Miruko said simply. "We get one shot to make our case or it'll be dismissed and buried. We can't mess this up." She crossed her arms and scowled. "They hurt Hawks as a warning to me. Partially, anyway. It's likely the Commission is getting suspicious of me so you'll be going solo for a bit."

"Do you think they're watching you?"

Miruko shrugged carelessly. "Maybe. Probably. They've definitely bugged my apartment at the very least. So I don't want to take any chances." She glanced towards the file about the

Todorokis, which lay hidden in the piles of reports. "Besides, while you're being your sneaky self and gathering ghosts, I have another case I can work on that'll piss them off. So I won't be suspiciously acting like a 'good wittle Hero' who got scared and gave up. That'd be out of character."

Mockingjay's lips twitched. "So you're going to hide that you're rebelling against them by rebelling in a smaller but equally infuriating way?"

"Yep." Miruko chirped, unrepentant.

Mockingjay almost smiled.

XXXXXXX

That night— well, the next morning but he was going to ignore that minor detail— Hawks flopped down on the couch, utterly exhausted. He had stayed late to calm Eri down, long enough that he had to text *and* call Miruko so she did not think he was missing again. The doctor's condition had only lengthened his stay since he had accompanied the man to another hospital to be checked over. And then the doctor's *lack* of condition extended his visit even further than that.

Doctor Eito Shiyokeru had been diagnosed with ischemic heart disease only a year ago. Now the tests— hurried along by a few handy Quirks meant for such purposes— showed the arteries around his heart had cleared significantly. In fact, the man claimed, he felt better than ever. Neither he, Hawks, or Aizawa told the hospital staff exactly how that 'miracle' happened, though they probably guessed.

Eri's Quirk was never brought up once at that hospital. Doctor Eito Shiyokeru had quickly counted his blessings and decided to go on an unplanned trip to America to celebrate his newfound health along with his cousin who was most definitely *not* a sidekick of the Hawks Hero Agency. Aizawa and Hawks promised to check in on him every few days and Hawks made a note to ask Mockingjay to do the same with her own list of contacts in her birth country.

Hawks knew Aizawa would like to keep the doctor close to make sure there were no bad side effects, but getting him out of the country was a more pressing matter.

Especially after Hawks 'bounced ideas' off Aizawa and 'theorized' what Eri's Quirk actually did.

All that mattered was no on died, Hawks was a bit closer to getting Eri's Quirk known to the right parties, and Doctor Eito Shiyokeru was out of Japan— and the Shie Hassaikai and Hero Commission's reach.

So yes, Hawks had a *very* long night.

And it was not even over yet.

Hawks did not lay down on his couch, opting to slouch and stare up at the ceiling as the voices shifted in his mind.

Pink, Yellow, we need to talk.

Hawks got the distinct impression of the two being shoved outside, a door slamming shut behind them. They hovered at the edge of his thoughts, trying to keep their distance, but they could not hide from him. He would not let them.

"We're listening." Pink whispered eventually.

I don't blame you, Hawks started.

"*You don't know what we did."* Yellow croaked.

Did you walk up to other Shigaraki and tell him other me was a spy?

"*No but—"*

Did you intend for the PLF to find out?

"*No but—"*

Did you investigate with the intention of exposing whatever you found?

"*No b—"*

Then why are you blaming yourselves? You made a bad call, yes. A… long list of bad calls. But you did not intend to get other me captured.

"*But our actions **did** get you captured."* Pink whispered. *"If we hadn't been so stupid, you might have been able to stop the PLF before they destroyed everything. Instead we exposed you because we stuck our noses where they didn't belong."*

That's why you were so upset about present Iida and Todoroki going after Stain against orders, Hawks realized.

Yellow flinched.

Pink held her ground. Barely. *"We want to pretend to know everything about doing what is right but we **don't**. You **died** because of us. Because we were so arrogant we thought we knew what was best when everyone warned us it wasn't."*

She was on the verge of tears. Hawks felt them prick at his eyes.

I'm not dead now, Hawks argued. *And I never will die like that again. We'll change events, and your future won't happen.*

Pink laughed bitterly. *"That doesn't make our past mistakes go away."*

Of course not, Hawks agreed. *But you shouldn't let your mistakes hinder you like this.*

"*We're not."* Yellow lied.

Which is why you're so hung up things you could not control… how many years later? A decade? Hawks closed his eyes and went for the throat of the problem. *You did not cause the collapse of Hero Society.*

Pink recoiled. Yellow shuddered.

"*Hawks—"*

You. Did not. Cause the collapse of Hero Society. Hawks repeated. *Yes, my other self's death was the 'beginning' of the end, but from what little I can gather, the Paranormal Liberation Front was going to attack and destabilize Hero Society anyway. You're no more to blame for their actions than Eri is for Overhaul's.*

"*You're a fucking madman trying to hug her when she could've vanished you."* Orange growled.

Orange, we are having a private conversation here. Could you at least pretend you aren't eavesdropping?

"*Could you at least pretend you aren't denying you were scared?"* Orange mocked.

I *wasn't scared.* ***You*** *were. You really need to stop projecting your feelings onto me. Thank you for worrying, but I'm still alive. We all are. Eri did not hurt us.*

Orange growled incoherently and retreated.

Back to you two. Hawks imagined poking them in the foreheads and heard satisfying yelps from both. *Your past is unchangeable, but this one can be changed. We can save everyone.*

"*I want to believe that…"* Yellow admitted.

"*But what if we make things worse?"* Pink finished.

Then we keep trying, as always. Hawks turned his thoughts further inward. *Green, I am very disappointed you did not have this conversation with these two earlier.*

"*I did."* Green muttered. *"I thought it worked."*

"*Well, what else were we supposed to do except pick ourselves up? Mope around and cry ourselves to sleep at night as we realized someone died because of us?"* Yellow's attempt at a joke fell flat. He shifted, and Hawks's eyes stung. *"We really are sor—"*

You don't need to apologize to me. I'm not dead or captured.

"*We won't let you be."* Pink said, and the fire was back in her voice.

Now that the voices were done 'moping' as Yellow put it, Hawks moved onto the next topic of discussion.

When we have free time, you can ask to use my body. Their surprise reverberated through him. *That goes for the rest of you too, who are totally not eavesdropping.* The other voices shuffled like scolded children. Hawks almost smiled. *We need to train your Quirks in this body. Plus Ennea should probably make a few more appearances. Maybe to get some intel on Overhaul to pass on to Nighteye's Agency. We still need to bring the Shie Hassaikai down.*

He had so little free time to begin with and if they did this he would have even less. He had to accept that, though. He wanted a peaceful world, and he would not get it if he did not allow the voices to use his body to try to better the future.

He would sacrifice everything he had to reach that goal. There was no other choice.

He owed it to them, their present selves, and Hero Society as a whole.

XXXXXXX

When it came down to it, Jin Bubagaiwara knew his priorities. He was not well in mind. He was what many would— too often callously— call deranged, mad, crazy, and an outsider of good society, so his priorities were to be himself and protect those that let him be him and accepted him.

Looking into the Winged Hero Hawks's life was absolutely nowhere on that short list. Sure, Hawks had been approved of by Stain, but Twice was not in the League for Stain. That was Spinner and maybe Dabi's thing? It was hard to tell with Dabi since he was sooooo anti-social. He never joined team meetings, the jerk. Anyway, Twice just wanted to *belong* and so he did not particularly care about what the Number Three Hero was up to.

All that changed when he found Hawks mid-panic attack in an alley. Twice had headed out the door for a smoke when he found the Winged Hero hunched against the base of the wall. Even in the dull lights of the street, his skin had been hauntingly pale as he gasped for air like he was drowning and he clutched at his head.

It was like looking in a distorted mirror, and Twice had acted on instinct, removing his over-shirt and wrapping it around Hawks head. The flinch had been expected, the lack of a following violent reaction certainly not.

When golden eyes focused on him, Twice saw *fear* there. Fear of what? Of him? As if he could frighten a top ranked Hero. A fear of being found then…? Twice did not know, and was sure he would never find out. Back then, he had committed to his actions as he always wanted to do, and stammered the phrase that haunted his lucid moments.

And then something even more unexpected happened.

Hawks had acted as if he *understood* what Twice meant by 'splitting'. He did not spit or sneer or demand to know what Twice thought he would accomplish by tying a shirt around his already bandanna-clad head. Instead he *thanked* him— genuinely— and mentioned he had PTSD before frantically trying to cover it up. He was so blatantly nervous, ashamed, and terrified Twice wondered exactly what others had done to him when he told them.

It was clear Hawks was… not well. Not in the same way Twice was unwell, but certainly in a debilitating fashion if his head-clutching and shaking were any indication. When Hawks had 'sunk into his head' as he put it, Twice had time to study him as he waited with him, because while he was a Villain, he would not just leave someone alone like that.

During his scrutiny, he saw cosmetic-covered cuts and bruises marring Hawks's face.

Twice was of average intelligence. He was not a detective. He was not close to being what people would call 'sound of mind'. But even he could tell something was not right. Sure, Hawks *could* have gotten beaten up by a Villain but that was highly unlikely.

So he did some research using the computer at Kurogiri's bar. He went over posts on Hawks-obsessed social media forums for the past few days and saw how many found it odd Hawks did not appear on most of Wednesday or at all on Thursday. Before "Hawks is missing again" panic articles could begin circulating, he was seen on Friday and the internet fawned over him once more. How could all of them miss he was wearing makeup to cover bruises?

A bit more research revealed Hawks had been trained by the Hero Public Safety Commission. Apparently they acted as a private school or something? That seemed *off* to Twice.

He typed 'Winged Hero Hawks real name' into Moogle's search bar and only speculation came up. People knew where he was born and his birthday, yet they could not find out his name. It was almost like Hawks's civilian self did not exist. Or he was erased from the records.

Twice smelled fish. A whole ocean of dead, floating fish. Or broken, caged birds.

"Just like *our* broken birdie, huh?"

Twice flinched and gripped at his head.

"Shut up." he hissed.

"Nah. Don't wanna." Twice brightened. "We should free the birdie!"

"Why the hell would we do that?" Twice asked warily.

"To *save* him." Twice said as if it were obvious. "Like real 'Heroes'. The fake Heroes will eat him alive or cast him out once they find out he's not normal. You know that, right? Because *he's just like us*."

Twice breathed heavily and struggled to reach his bag as his vision blurred and multiplied.

Splitting. He was *splitting*—

He yanked his mask over his head and did a thumbs up.

"Freeing the birdie sounds like a great idea! We should kidnap him!"

"It does not." Twice argued. "We cannot kidnap a Hero. And kidnapping him would not make him like or trust us. You have been spending too much time with Himiko. That is not how it works."

"Could too work." Twice shot back. "And can too do it. We're *Villains*. We can do whatever we want. Plus it's not *bad* kidnapping. It's preemptive rescue. Or forcibly moving him from a not-nice place! Someone's hurting him and the Heroes aren't doing jack about it."

"That is true." Twice mused, rubbing his chin as he considered the idea. "Boss man's probably not for the whole 'rescuing' thing though. He's more of a 'kill on sight' kind of man. Unless it's for the Nomu."

"It could be a team bonding exercise!" Twice cheered.

"We are not ready or meant for such a strenuous 'team bonding exercise'." Twice lectured.

"We are totally ready!"

"We will get ourselves captured or killed in an instant."

"If we help Birdie he might become one of us!"

"He will never join our side."

"He's *like us*. And he doesn't know we're a Villain yet… Think he'd want to hang out and be…*friends*?"

"Friendship *can* be found in the oddest places. Perhaps we *could* at least try…"

"*I can be your Villain, Birdie~!*" Twice hummed. "*I can punch them in the face~!*"

"That did not rhyme."

"Critic."

"In moderation, self-criticism can be a good step in gaining self-confidence."

"What?"

"...Even I don't understand that one."

Twice plopped himself down in his seat and stared intently at the picture of Hawks's face on the screen.

"Now… What do *I* want to do?"

XXXXXXX

Unknown to Twice, he was not the only person privy to what he was looking at.

As much as All Might may believe it, All For One did not spend every waking second plotting the end of Hero Society. He could do other things, feel other emotions, grow bored, become… curious. So when one of the members of the League of Villains began using Kurogiri's computer in earnest, he let himself follow along with a technology-based Quirk he'd acquired to 'observe' what his newer member was doing.

Well well well. This was *unexpected*. Twice had put together in a couple hours what all of Hero Society refused to believe. In another world and under different circumstances, he may have been a good detective. Or perhaps he was so used to seeing the dark underbelly he did not blind himself to them like the so-called 'Heroes'.

And here All For One had been thinking Endeavor was the tantalizing fracture that would bring all of Hero Society down.

All For One's smile pulled grotesquely at the tubes attached to his face.

"How *interesting*."

He would have to look into this himself.

Scoptophobia

"I hate the news." was how Miruko greeted Hawks on Sunday morning.

"Why, I never knew." Hawks joked, though the scowl on her face had him worried. "What did they do this time?"

She turned her glower back to her phone. "Have you seen the tabloids?"

"*Those that write tabloids are the scum of the earth."* Silver growled.

He sounded so personally offended Hawks had to muffle an inappropriately-timed giggle. "What do they say this time? Am I secretly two cats in a trench coat? Oh, I know! I'm secretly an alien. Wait, that's not juicy enough… I'm secretly a *royal* alien forced to flee my homeworld. *And* I have a secret twin from another dimension. Who is also from Atlantis, somehow. Am I close enough to the craziness yet?"

Miruko did not smile. "It's not about you this time, Baby Bird. According to this I went on a drunken bender and assaulted some chick." She threw her phone down in disgust. "I'll never understand how people can write that *crap* like it's some drama novel—" She caught sight of his expression. "Hawks, spill."

Hawks considered making light of the tabloids' antics and how no one would believe them, but deep down he knew they likely had not come up with their tale by themselves. Miruko was drunk Friday. The Commission's warning was Wednesday. The timing was too close to be a coincidence.

He should have known the Commission would have eyes on him when he went out with the others.

"*I can't believe they're actually doing this…"* Green gasped.

Silver's outrage almost put Orange's anger to shame.

Hawks ignored the voices and their turbulent emotions for now. "Remember what Jeanist mentioned? I think *they're* starting their pettiness campaign." He winced as he remembered Miruko's apartment was bugged. "Never mind. That's probably not it. I'm just being paranoid. Forget I said that."

Miruko slowly looked at her phone and back to him. She poked him in the shoulder. "It's just a tabloid article. It doesn't mean anything, and no one will believe it."

"But what if its planting the seeds for something bigger?" Hawks mumbled. His voice lowered further. "Or what if it's another threa— reminder?"

"Then we'll combat it with it with the truth." Miruko said stubbornly.

Hawks slowly shook his head. He knew how the Commission did this type of thing. Start with something for people to glance at out of curiosity, but slowly whittle away until it seemed more and more plausible. "They won't make it that simple. If they want to discredit you they'll make things bigger and more believable until they catch you doing something 'bad'. It doesn't even have to be anything to do with this—"

"I told you not to worry about me." Miruko interrupted. "I can handle a little slander if it gets to that."

Hawks shifted his weight and tucked his chin. He didn't have his costume on yet. He should probably be getting ready for work. But he couldn't just leave it at that. "I could—"

"You are not becoming a loyal lapdog for my sake." Miruko interrupted again. She poked him in the shoulder. "And if I hear you're playing good boy because they made some vague threats, I will be sorely disappointed."

Hawks frowned. "I wasn't going to." He nibbled on his lip and shifted from side to side, almost rocking in place. "Be careful?"

"Sure. I promise I won't go on a drinking binge and deck a chick who probably deserved it." Miruko said dryly.

Although her tone was sarcastic, Hawks had the feeling she was taking his worries seriously.

He hoped so, anyway.

He went to work as usual, and flew right up to the top of the building to enter through the window. Even with the voices, the office still felt empty. Mockingjay was off doing her own thing— Hawks could only pray she was not plotting the Commission's downfall at the moment— leaving him… alone.

He did not *feel* alone.

And not just because of the voices.

Guys, be real with me. Are we being watched?

"*I don't know if we are or if it's paranoia."* Green said.

Thanks for your honesty.

Hawks shot his empty office a wary glance and hurried back outside. He wondered if it would be too paranoid of him to ask Mockingjay to search the place for bugs and cameras. Though that would not help much if anyone on the Commission payroll had a hacking Quirk…

And I am ***not*** *thinking about that.*

Hawks pushed those paranoid thoughts out of his mind and started his patrol.

XXXXXXX

If one were to check the Hero Network to see what mission Miruko was on, it would claim she was pursuing a running conman and was thus unavailable at the moment. Miruko was most definitely not chasing a conman, despite what the Hero Network said, though if asked later she would happily proclaim he got pretty far before she kicked him into a crater.

Instead she weaved through crowded streets in civilian clothes, with a red hat covering her ears and a bag filled with textbooks slung over her shoulder. She looked more like an older college student than a Pro Hero. That was exactly the point, for she seamlessly blended in with the other students milling about.

The coffee shop she approached was popular with the local students, who took advantage of the free internet, wide tables, and endless supply of caffeine to get through the slog of essays and projects they faced. Miruko had never been to a university like this but she recognized the look of utter despair on some faces as more exhausted students struggled to handle their monstrous workload.

Miruko loathed that expression more than what was probably reasonable. She knew what too much pressure could do to a young adult, having seen such breakdowns firsthand when she first took Hawks under her figurative 'wing'. She had to resist the desire to go over and hug a poor girl who looked ready to burst into tears as she stared at a glowing computer screen like someone who just had something explode in their face.

Miruko had no time to chat with all these students, only one.

The Todoroki investigation was stalling. It had been for days, and she'd reluctantly come to admit she'd need to interview one of them to gain any new insight and evidence. The psych profiles she had on each of them suggested Natsuo Todoroki may be the most willing to talk. Fuyumi would keep her father's neglect to herself or downplay it, as would Shoto, and asking Rei about her husband would simply be cruel. Thus, Natsuo.

As Miruko set up her laptop in the corner of the cafe and scanned the crowd for another head of white hair. Based on her research, Natsuo would be arriving soon, as was his habit. The predictability in his schedule would be worrisome, but there were no active threats against the civilians of the Todoroki family so she tried not to worry about it. As Miruko waited, she went over what she knew about her target.

Nineteen years old. Enrolled in a course for health and welfare to become a doctor. Possibly has a girlfriend though that's unconfirmed. Has an ice Quirk that allows him to freeze things that touch his skin and lower his body temperature like his mother. Can endure extremely hot temperatures but ***only*** *when his Quirk is in use, which is rare to none since such usage would be illegal in most instances. When it's not in use, he's vulnerable to heat because he has a body used to cold. Never trained to be a Hero, showed no interest. Speaks politely about the Hero Endeavor, but never as his father. Only as the Number Two Hero.*

It was clear that Natsuo held some colder feelings towards 'dear' old Dad, and Miruko could only hope those feelings would result in a frank conversation rather than the polite non-

answers Fuyumi and Shoto were likely to give her due to their home life being 'none of her business'.

What kind of world did they live in, that abuse and neglect were kept private because there was 'no need' for it to be brought up and for the sake of 'stability'? Whoever decided status and societal niceties could override abusive actions could rot in hell. She'd investigate no matter who ordered her to stop. It was her *duty* as a Hero to act, no matter who the victim or the perpetrator were.

Better her than Hawks, who— despite his insistence that he was fine— did not have the clearest head when it came to investigating abuse. He always got twitchy whenever abuse cases came up, somehow being incredibly insightful and compassionate when it came to helping abuse victims while completely refusing to comprehend he himself was one and failing to extend that compassion to himself.

A few tables down from Miruko, the hollow-eyed young woman burst into tears. Miruko glanced over and saw the message on her laptop's screen, which stated her file had been corrupted and could not be found. She closed her own computer, and went over to the sobbing student, sitting next to her.

"Hey." Miruko soothed. "What happened?"

"My entire project was c-corrupted." the student sobbed. "I had *months* of research. It's due tomorrow. I'm going to *fail!*" She cried louder. A few other students looked her way but— upon seeing Miruko was taking care of it— turned back to their own books.

"Okay." Miruko reached for the keyboard and paused. "May I?"

"Do what you want." The young woman hiccuped. "It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does." Miruko said fiercely.

With the girl's permission, she installed a version of the program she herself used at her Agency in case there was a colossal system crash. She had lost count of the times hacker villains attempted to delete or corrupt the Heroes' files on them, only for it to backfire when the Heroes got them back along with the knowledge that someone wanted those files gone.

This version of the program was for personal and civilian use and she had it on her own laptop— and the one that held all her evidence for the Todoroki and Commission cases. The little bee symbol was almost like its own Hero insignia with how much it helped her and others. Besides, even Mockingjay trusted it. In fact, she was the one who introduced Miruko to the program in the first place.

Within minutes, the program had retrieved and uncorrupted the student's project, leaving it all intact.

The young woman immediately hugged Miruko. "*Thank you!* You're my Hero!"

Miruko chuckled. "Don't tell anyone."

She helped the girl clean up her face— apparently her mascara was not tear-proof— and returned to her seat with a nice, sugary concoction few would still consider coffee. The student had insisted it was the least she could do, and since Miruko wasn't actually a student, she accepted the free drink rather than risk the woman wanting to help her with her own 'project'.

As soon as she settled back in the corner, Miruko saw the coffee shop's door open and a white head of hair came through.

She raised her hand and waved. "Natsuo! Over here! I saved you a spot!"

Endeavor's second-eldest son glanced her way and did a double-take. It was almost comical as he looked left and right, as if he wondered if there was another Natsuo she was speaking to. Her assessment of his agreeable personality proved to be correct as he headed over to her with his bag slung over his shoulder.

"Hello." he greeted politely. "I don't believe we've met, though you seem to know me. Are you another student?"

"Yeah, I'm a student." Miruko subtly showed him her Hero ID. "Can we talk for a sec? I could use some help with a project and I heard you're the guy to turn to for answers."

Natsuo eyed her warily but nodded. They sat in a corner of the busy cafe as the chatter of other students covered their own conversation. Miruko made a show of pulling out a few of the books she had brought with her before turning back to him. Natsuo leaned over and pretended to read the text.

"Is my family alright?" was his first, quiet question.

"They're not in any current danger from Villains." Miruko reassured him instantly. "However, they *are* part of an ongoing investigation. Your siblings and mother are not in trouble." She was quick to clarify as Natsuo's grey eyes narrowed. She almost wished she was surprised when he did not ask why his father was not included in being guiltless. "I just need to ask you a few questions about your home life."

Natsuo's face was oddly blank. Not angry or upset, but as if he was unsure how to feel as he slowly realized where this conversation might be headed.

Miruko decided to cut to the chase. "Was Endeavor abusive and neglectful?"

Grey eyes narrowed. "How did you find out?"

No denial. Not even a stutter. With how readily he replied, Miruko had to wonder how the *hell* no one had asked and gotten the truth revealed to them before.

She crossed her arms. "Another Hero saw some suspicious things with Shoto and put two and two together. He couldn't investigate himself so he trusted me with it."

"Couldn't?" Natsuo asked.

"*Couldn't* due to time constraints and it hitting too close to home." Miruko replied brutally.

Natsuo blinked and seemed to put two and two together. "He was neglected, too?"

"Yeah." Miruko said vaguely, though she could not say she was upset by his assumption.

Someone more bitter might have accused the other Hero of being unable to investigate because of Endeavor's status. Instead, Natsuo realized what 'close to home' meant and emphasized with the other Hero despite not knowing him. More people needed instinctive empathy like that. He would be a great doctor someday.

Natsuo looked down at the medical book but Miruko had the feeling he was not seeing the text on the page. His jaw clenched and the muscles in his neck quivered before he looked back up at Miruko, meeting her eyes.

"What do you need to know?"

"As much as you can tell me about Endeavor's abuse." Miruko said, straight to the point. "The timeline of events, specific instances, people in the know."

"Are you going to expose him?" Natsuo asked levelly.

"Only if your family wants me to. I'm not investigating this to make a spectacle of it. If you don't want him arrested because of the media circus it'll draw to you, I want to at least get your siblings and your mother away from him. You shouldn't have to live in silence."

Natsuo hesitated and slumped in his chair. "It's not as bad as it used to be when Shoto was younger. *He* doesn't beat him up until he pukes anymore, at the very least. And with mom… in the hospital, he doesn't hit her when she tries to object."

'*Because she isn't there **to** object.'* went unsaid.

Miruko sensed Natsuo wanted to say more and let him talk his thoughts out for what may very well be the first time.

"A public arrest and investigation won't help." Natsuo admitted with little bitterness. He had definitely thought about it before, and maybe done a little research himself. "Shoto understands what *he* did is wrong, but also thinks *he* made him who he is. And Fuyumi just wants a happy family. If *he* magically 'changed' overnight and decided to be a 'good father', she'd accept him and try to keep the family together. I love her, but dear God does she *not* understand how… I don't want to say terrible but… how unwanted that idea is. If you get him, I want him *away* from my family and out of our lives for good."

"You'd never want to see your father again?" Miruko asked, simply because it was a standard question and not out of some cruel desire to see Natsuo question himself.

"Never." Natsuo's voice was as cold as the ice he wielded. "He could apologize to Mom, release her from the hospital, and stay away from her for the rest of her life. He could stop hurting Shoto and pressuring him to surpass All Might. He could shower Fuyumi with all the love and praise she deserves. But I will *never* forgive him. He's a hypocrite who can't stand

his own failings so much he let them ruin our lives." His jaw clenched. "He can *never* atone for what he's done."

"Why?" Miruko needed to know.

Natsuo told her.

She almost wished he didn't.

XXXXXXX

Hawks spent the day doing his usual thing, saving people, helping grannies, saving cats, and slowly his paranoia drained away. The Commission's way of training him was awful, but he could not deny he loved being a Hero. He just did not want to be the Hero they wanted him to be. He wanted to be a person too, not a Symbol.

He stopped a bank robbery by a particularly incompetent villain, but was soon distracted by a woman striking what appeared to be her daughter. It only took a second to separate the two, and Hawks found some bitter relief that she was a babysitter and not the girl's parent.

As he stayed with the child and let her poke his wings with her tiny fingers, he shoved down the bubbling anger that if he had not been there, it was likely no one else would have stepped in even though the woman had struck a child. *In public*.

"*Someone might have."* Pink thought optimistically. *"Quirks weren't involved."*

"*I doubt it."* Purple countered, tone flat. *"They'd probably still worry about getting into trouble."*

As the girl's distressed father arrived and they were taken to be questioned, Hawks watched the babysitter shriek she had done nothing wrong and all children were brats. He stayed until she was safely in the police car— with a new 'resisting arrest' charge placed on her— and was driven away.

Hawks moved on, as he always did, but the incident burned itself into his thoughts. He forced himself to not think about the kids he couldn't and didn't know needed help, instead focusing on those he could and did. Like Eri. And hopefully— eventually— Shoto.

Hawks ignored White's quiet doubt about that last one.

He'd help Eri move to UA later this week. He technically did not have to since she had so little to move but he and Aizawa hoped it would make her more comfortable with the change. She kept asking if Hawks really would come visit and he swore her fragile relief was going to bring him to tears one day. How could a child look so confused when someone agreed to help them? Did she think she wasn't worth it or something?

Hawks hoped a ton of positive feedback would steer her out of that kind of thinking. He almost wished he could take care of her but it was impossible, in part because the Commission would not hesitate to threaten her to keep him in line. That thought made Hawks pause in midair in order to take a few calming breaths. He hovered for a moment just to be

sure he would not beat the next villain he came across with more force than necessary before moving on.

"We should—"

No, Green.

"I didn't finish—"

You didn't have to. We're not doing anything about the Commission.

"What if they do try something with Eri?" Green demanded.

Hawks's lips twisted into a feral snarl that would make the bravest of Heroes flee. *They wouldn't get the chance to try.*

How could Green feel both approval and sorrow at once? *"And yet they're allowed to hurt you—"*

We are not having this conversation again.

*"We haven't had this conversation at all because **somebody's** in denial."* Orange snapped.

Look who's talking. But we are Not. Having. This conversation, Hawks repeated.

The voices did not attempt to hide their disapproval. Or their worry. Hawks wished they'd understand the Commission had acted as was normal and not go on like some horrible evil had been revealed. He finished patrol and landed in the street, stretching his wings as he prepared to take flight again. It was dark out and his stomach grumbled unhappily, moodily informing him he hadn't had dinner yet. Or lunch. Wait, did he stop for lunch?

"No, you didn't." Silver scolded. *"Taking care of yourself is a key part to being a Hero."*

Sorry, I'll try to make time to eat my vegetables, Hawks thought with a good dose of sarcasm.

"You should carry snacks for yourself." Red offered.

I already carry energy bars and the like for civilians in case of an emergency. And treats for pets.

"Yes, and you can carry snacks for yourself, too." Red twitched and spoke more rapidly. *"I can add a pocket to your costume. You don't have to empty one that's already used for your food."*

Hawks did not realize he had tensed up until he relaxed. *Thanks. That would work.*

"The Commission can go to hell." Orange said.

That has nothing to do with this conversation and we are still not discussing it.

"It does too have to do with it." Orange snapped. *"You don't even realize you feel guilty for 'wasting' a damn **pocket** on yourself—"*

"That's enough, Orange. Stop pushing him." White warned. *"If he doesn't want to talk about it, we don't have to."*

"Know from experience?" Orange sneered.

"Yes." White said stoically.

Moving on, Hawks thought loudly. *We'll have some free time tonight. Rumi will be home but we should be able to go out. Who wants to beat up some Villains?*

"Me—"

"I would." White said, interrupting Orange.

Hawks was less surprised than he should be. *Do I need to lecture you about holding back?*

"No. I will maintain control."

Hawks decided he'd lingered long enough but still looked longingly at one of the vendors. They were selling takoyaki. He reminded himself he had food at home and could not spend any money. He might not be able to pay his bills as it was. And if he did buy some, he'd certainly hear about his 'frivolous' waste of time. Before he could retreat, the vendor spotted him and perked up.

"Hawks?"

Hawks put on a grin and strode over. "The one and only."

He'd never get used to the way many civilians beamed at him when they recognized him. When he first started out, he knew the point was to be someone they recognized as a protector, but the way they lit up bewildered him because couldn't they see every mistake he made during that rescue, or that arrest, or that mission?

It had taken some patient explaining from Miruko that being half a second slow was *not* something civilians tended to notice and that the public would not turn against him for hesitating in confusion before he waved back at them. The Commission had taught him that his every action and reaction would be viciously judged, and although that was partially the case, it was nowhere near the extreme they claimed. Hawks guessed it was another exaggeration the Commission cooked up to make him act *perfectly* with the threat of 'they'll turn on you in an instant and eat you alive'.

Sometimes he wondered if he ever would have realized the truth without Miruko. He tried not to think too deeply about that, because if he were honest with himself he probably would have been dead before his nineteenth birthday without her.

Hawks took a moment to lean on the counter of the takoyaki stand and look around. "This is a nice place you got here. Is business doing well?"

The vendor looked surprised— and delighted— at his interest. "Oh, yes. We've been open for five generations now. This business was started by my great-great grandparents."

"Wow." Hawks whistled. "You're family-owned?"

"Of course. We've always been a small business and see no reason to change." He noticed Hawks's gaze lingering on the takoyaki. "Would you like some?"

Hawks kept his smile in place. "Thank you but I couldn't possibly—"

"Please have some." the vendor insisted. He gathered some takoyaki and handed it to Hawks. "On the house."

Hawks's tense smile relaxed and he bowed deeply. "Thank you."

His phone rang and he excused himself to answer it. "Hi, Rumi."

Her annoyed voice came through the speaker. *"Hey. Are you busy?"*

Hawks tipped his head to hold his phone between his shoulder and cheek as he held the takoyaki in one hand, checked a report from Mockingjay on his work-phone in the other, and saved a dog from getting run over by a car.

"Kinda, kinda not. Why?"

"Do you have the other apartment key?"

Hawks muffled a laugh. "You locked yourself out didn't you?"

"No!"

"You di-id~" Hawks sang.

"Stop teasing me and come help, you overgrown chicken!"

"Wow. I have never heard that one before in all my years. How unique of an insult. I should print it out and hang it in my office."

Miruko hissed at him.

Hawks chuckled. "Don't get your ears in a twist, sis. I'll be there in a few minutes."

He waved to the vendor and flew off, landing a few streets away so he could enjoy the takoyaki in private. He leaned against a wall and kept a few feathers on 'watch duty' as he considered the snack. He was not the only one. Purple was focused on it as well. Ripples of something comparable to nostalgia trickled out of him.

You like takoyaki? Hawks questioned.

"*I gained a taste for it."* Purple said evasively.

"*He worked with someone who liked it for a while."* Okay, Hawks must be hallucinating because Orange almost sounded *fond*.

"*Fatgum died though."* Yellow added. *"Oh, shit I'm sorry!"*

Hawks caught a brief flash of a familiar yellow suit, its owner thin and mangled like a broken doll. He shivered and he and the voices simultaneously repressed the memory. Despite that, Purple continued to eye the takoyaki with something close to longing.

Hawks took a breath. *Would you like to take control?*

Purple's surprise jabbed through him. *"Can I?"*

Sure. Go ahead.

Hawks shoved down his unease and let Purple push him aside and take the reigns. Not being in control when his body was eating was *weird*. Purple's cautious happiness made it worth it though. Hawks saw flickers of countless patrols where he— not him, Purple— where *Purple* worked alongside the BMI Hero. Many were awful, centered around the time Hero Society was falling apart, but there was joy there too in the simple times of sitting on rooftops and eating takoyaki with Fatgum, a white-cloaked Hero, and one with red hair that looked vaguely familiar. Orange repressed his grief before Purple could feel it but Hawks did. He wondered who the red-haired Hero was to him.

Purple finished the takoyaki and Hawks held his breath, waiting to see what he would do next. He felt Purple begin to fall back but he paused. If Hawks was in sync with his body, his heartbeat would have sped up.

Purple—

"*Someone's watching us."* Purple interrupted.

He looked around with Hawks's sharp eyes and— without warning— threw two of his feathers into the shadows. A thud and muffled curse greeted him and he dashed into the alley, hands twitching towards his neck where something wasn't there. The lack of his weapon did not deter him and he sprang upon the hooded figure that was struggling to get his arms free of the feathers pinning him. Purple planted his foot on his chest. A feather to his throat made the man go still.

"Why are you following us?" Hawks's body growled, voice lower and more menacing than normal.

"What's wrong with you? I didn't do nothing!" the man hissed, but the way he kept his voice down rather than yell for help betrayed his guilt. "You're—"

"Tell me the truth. Why were you following us?"

Hawks's body's voice did not change, but Hawks felt *something* commanding there. A shiver went up his spine.

The pinned man went still, and spoke tonelessly. "I was sent by the Commission to follow you."

Hawks did not know who felt more alarmed, himself or Purple as they realized Purple had used his Quirk on the man. Purple glanced at the feather he had pressed to the man's skin and Hawks's body's teeth clenched.

"Tell me why." he ordered.

"You must be punished." the agent said.

"What does that mean?" Purple demanded.

"You will be punished." the agent repeated.

He doesn't know what they plan to do to me, Hawks thought.

"Were you ordered to capture us?" Purple asked. "*Tell me.*"

"No. Merely follow and report."

"Report what?"

"Who you interact with."

"Why?"

"To see what bad habits must be discouraged." the agent said robotically.

Hawks thought about the vendor and a rock settled in his stomach. *They're seeing who I act 'unheroic' with.*

"The fact that that was your first assumption is kind of unnerving." Silver noted.

"*Okay, I know I joked about stalking but this is disturbing as **hell**."* Yellow said loudly.

Are you even surprised?

"*No."*

Purple glared down at the Commission agent. "You will forget my interaction with the takoyaki vendor. You will forget this conversation. You will not mention the takoyaki vendor or this conversation in your report or elsewhere. You will not give this information willingly, accidentally, or unwillingly."

The repeated rephrasing seemed odd to Hawks until he realized Purple was trying to close any loopholes. *Maybe* the amount of control and thought Purple put into this should disturb him, but it didn't. It just showed Purple knew what he was doing. Hopefully.

"Once I am out of sight, carry on." Purple finished.

He stood back, removed the feathers from the Commission agent's clothes, and left. Hawks snapped back into his body and flew up to the top of a building. He sat down heavily and stared at the feathers he still held. They crumbled in his fingers.

Are you sure that will work? was his first thought.

"*It... **should?**"* Hawks did *not* like to hear the questioning there. Purple shook himself and spoke more confidently. *"Even if he remembers our interaction, he won't remember the brainwashing. He'll just think he forgot about the vendor and won't question it. That's what **usually** happens, anyway. I've... done this kind of thing before."* Guilt prodded at Hawks's mind. *"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have confronted him like that. I put us all in danger."*

"Do you think they suspect something?" Green asked.

Maybe. Probably. We'll need to keep being careful.

Hawks checked his phone, only to find a few annoyed texts from Miruko. He hurried to the apartment before she could decide to break into her own house.

XXXXXXX

Twice was not stalking Hawks.

…The fact that he needed to clarify that did not make him look good, but it was true. He was not stalking Hawks, he was merely… watching him.

From a distance.

Without him knowing.

But he *wasn't* being a stalkerish weirdo, okay? Twice did not follow him everywhere, or to his home, or make notes on his every move or anything creepy like that. He merely watched a bit of Hawks's patrol as he tried to figure out what he wanted to accomplish by being here and how to do it.

It didn't help that he kept getting distracted by Hawks doing actual Hero stuff.

He saved cats from trees and dogs from being run over by cars. He helped little old ladies with their groceries.

Twice was not a Stain fan guy like Spinner, Dabi, and Toga, but *wow* Hawks *actually did that Heroic stuff*.

But back to his reason for not-stalking Hawks.

The goal of his trip sounded simple but really wasn't. He wanted to figure out how to approach Hawks with offers of possible-friendship without appearing to be a stalker.

He wasn't succeeding very well.

Hindsight was a jerk, and Twice cursed it under his breath as he walked down a street in Fukuoka with his mask reassuringly in his pocket. The simple solution to his problem had already passed. He should have asked for Hawks's number outside of the bar. Would that have been weird? Possibly. Would it have been weirder than showing up in Fukuoka and going 'Hey, want to be friends possibly, my possible-potential-friend?' No.

Twice would tell social norms to go screw themselves and just walk up to Hawks when he was semi-alone, but now that he'd been dithering and following the Hero all day, that would just scream 'Stalker!'

Especially after Hawks had to confront an *actual* stalker by the looks of it.

But *had* it been Hawks?

Twice's instincts said 'No.' He had not been able to hear or see everything from where he crouched in a doorway and argued with himself so much about interfering or not that he almost split, but something had been *off* about the Hero when he confronted that creepy actual-stalker guy.

Twice was good at identifying body language and tone, and 'Hawks's' had been all wrong.

No, that was rude to assume. He of all people should know there could be more than one side to a person. In Hawks's case, that other side seemed to be a bit more separate and literal. Like Twice himself was split more literally.

Twice shivered and pulled his hood over his head, fingers curling and uncurling as he convinced himself he did not need to put on his mask yet.

The Hawks that confronted the stalker was too different to be the Hawks he'd followed most of the day. The… not 'normal', but usual Hawks was cheerful by default and confronted adversity with a smile except when he felt he could tremble and break.

That Hawks in the alley had not been cheerful or smiling. He had not taken down the stalker with a fierce grin or even a sharp glare. Glares could be normal for Hawks, but the Hawks in the alley had been *too* cold, calculating, and unforgiving.

Twice had seen pictures of Hawks at his most serious— and done his best to ignore the internet's captions fawning over how 'sexy' Hawks looked when he was angry— and not one photo had come close to the absolute, unrepentant, calculated mercilessness he'd seen in that alley. He wasn't even malicious. Just… *rationally decisive*, like he saw the moral line Heroes were not supposed to cross and calmly stepped over it for his goals.

The Hawks everyone knew and adored *never* looked ready to kill to protect himself but the Hawks in that alley certainly did. He would kill to protect himself, and possibly to protect some other personalities, if that Hawks's use of 'us' was any indication.

How many are in there?

Twice did not know. He wanted to find out. Out of a selfish desire for companionship and understanding, maybe. But also for Hawks himself because boy was the birdie was having problems and probably needed someone who would not shun him for being socially unacceptable.

Wasn't that notion of helping so 'heroic' of Twice? It made him uncomfortable, but hey, he was a Villain. He could do what he wanted.

Twice's goal had not been achieved today— not even close— but he had learned one thing.

It looked like his theory that Hawks was like him was not so far-fetched after all, and he might get in trouble for it in the future.

Now to figure out what and how to do something about it without getting the birdie hurt by the Society that currently adored him. Twice was a Villain, not a monster. He didn't want to destroy what little comfort Hawks so tentatively had.

Though honestly? Preemptively rescuing Hawks was becoming more appealing by the day.

Maybe he could convince Dabi to help. That might just get the ever-elusive Villain to spend some time with the team.

XXXXXXX

Hawks arrived at the apartment to find Miruko standing in front of the door with her foot raised as if she were about to kick. And considering this was Miruko, said kick would definitely bust it down.

"Please don't kill our door." he begged dryly. "It has a family."

Miruko lowered her foot. "I have been waiting here for *half an hour.*" she growled.

"Sorry. I had a stalker I needed to ditch. Not a *real* stalker this time, but…" Hawks unlocked the door, realized what he had said, and carefully looked at a fuming Miruko out of the corner of his eye. "...Can we pretend I never said that?"

"You had a Commission lackey following you."

It was not a question, but Hawks replied like it was anyway. "Yeah. I lost him though."

Miruko looked into their likely-bugged apartment and exhaled slowly. "Think the bugs have censors? I'd *love* to fill their equipment with grating bleeps."

"Cussing like a sailor is unbecoming of a Hero." Hawks said with exaggerated loftiness. "...But I wouldn't complain. Don't be too loud though. I don't think the neighbors would appreciate their kids being taught swear words."

"They'll learn eventually." Miruko muttered. She glared into her apartment. "I'm getting you-know-who to bring the pesticide as soon as possible."

"It'll just invite another infestation." Hawks sighed. He hesitated and glanced down. "If you want them gone I can mo—"

"No."

"But I—"

"No. They'll just bury you in more debts. And I'm not kicking you to the curb because—" She leaned into the apartment. "*—the 'insects' are CREEPY, STALKING PISS-BITCHES WHO SHOULD GET THE STICKS OUT OF THEIR ASSES!*" She slammed the door shut and glowered at it.

"You're lucky I still have the key." Hawks said dryly.

"Hush. Let me be dramatic."

Hawks unlocked the door again but did not open it. "You'll be happy to know I also s-spen— wasted some time eating takoyaki today."

Miruko smiled. She almost looked proud. In a nice way, not like Amplifier. "Takoyaki huh?" She glanced down at his empty hands. "You didn't get me any?"

"No." Hawks dropped his gaze. The takoyaki felt heavy in his stomach. "I'm sorry. I didn't think—"

"I was just teasing." Miruko interrupted. Her red eyes were too solemn as they studied his face. "You've been… twitchier since you went to Commission HQ."

"Have not." Hawks said curtly.

"Have too." She countered. "I get why though. You can't hide it from me." Her fingers brushed his cheek where a bruise had faded to a yellow-tinged green. "You're acting a bit like you used to, ya know. Like you think I'm gonna hit you if you *breathe* wrong."

Hawks's lips thinned. "I never thought that."

"Right." She said flatly. She abruptly yanked him into one of her patented bone-crushing hugs.

Hawks accepted it as a usual Rumi-hug, but as she continued to hug him and not let go, he began to feel just a little uncomfortable. "Is everything okay?"

She squeezed him tighter. "Yes."

That was a lie if he ever heard one. He chuckled nervously. "You're being a little intense here."

"I just want to hug you because someone should."

Hawks did not know what to say to that. "...Okay?"

She released him enough to grip his shoulders. "I've been investigating."

Hawks glanced pointedly at the easily eavesdropped hallway they stood in. Though honestly, the apartment wasn't any safer. Neither was their offices, probably. Anymore, *possibly*, since the Commission had not found out about Ennea when they first appeared. Now, his office was probably as watched as a prison cell. He tried not to think about it and focused on the topic at hand.

"Investigating *him*?" He said, because even now he dare not say Endeavor's name.

"Yeah. And other things."

Hawks's brow wrinkled. "What does that have to do with a hug…?"

"Do I really need to spell it out for you? She saw something that freaked her out and just wanted a hug, dumbass." Orange snapped.

That did not sound like Miruko. She didn't seek comfort—

'*Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face. You are a Hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

Hawks ignored that invasive thought because Miruko was not him. *He* was the one meant to follow that rule so others would not have to. Still, things must be bad if she reacted to Endeavor's actions like *this*.

"I know this is hypocritical of me but do you want to share what's got you so… upset?"

Miruko laughed without humor. "I'm not upset. I'm *pissed*. Not just about *him* either."

Hawks waited patiently for her to continue. She didn't and went inside. Her keys sat on the countertop where she'd left them. She picked them up and threw them into her purse with unnecessary force.

"I want to tell you but you've already got a lot on your plate."

"This isn't about my 'plate'." Hawks denied. "I just… *need* to know. It'd be unfair to Shoto to live in rose-tinted ignorance for my own selfish sense of comfort. And I'd rather find out from you than other ways."

Miruko huffed, blowing a lock of her hair out of her face. "Shoulda known you'd say that." She glared upward as if daring the Commission's bugs to hear her.

Before Hawks could prod her again, she spoke.

"His eldest was admitted to the hospital with massive burns some years ago. He had been taken hostage and there was some type of 'Quirk-related' accident during the incident. Long story short, him and the perp caught on fire. The official reports *insist* it was 'definitely' the kid's uncontrollable fire Quirk to blame. The kid apparently died. But according to my source..." She averted her gaze. "…Endeavor put the villain's capture over his son's safety

and burned his son alive along with the perp. He didn't get the kid away first. He just threw a fucking *inferno* at them both."

Hawks felt his skin drain of color.

"There's more." Miruko warned.

Hawks braced himself.

"According to the reports, the kid saw dear old dad's flames coming and used his Quirk." she continued. "He covered himself with his own fire for some reason. No one knows what was going through his head. He might've panicked and thought his flames would stop his father's or something. Or maybe he realized what was going to happen wanted it to end faster. Between his flames and Endeavor's he lit up faster than a fucking *grass fire*."

Miruko abruptly yanked Hawks into another hug, pressing her face into his shoulder. She showed no indication she wanted to cry, but he felt her shaking. Hawks's throat closed up. In his head, a wall *cracked* and shadowy blue smoke leaked through.

"***How sad… Shoto Todoroki."***

Hawks leaned back to indicate he wanted— *needed*— out of the embrace. Miruko immediately released him and he stepped back, folding his arms and gripping his elbows tightly.

"I see." Hawks swallowed and motioned vaguely. "I'm just going to…"

He had no idea what he was going to say. Or do.

Miruko did not pressure him. She put a hand on his shoulder and left him with his thoughts. And the voices.

Hawks wished he could be the type of person that ignored things they didn't want to think about. Even if he had been, ignoring White's emotions would be as effective as ignoring a forest fire.

Shoto, do you know what happened to Touya?

White's presence radiated guilt, grief, and pain.

"He goes by 'Dabi' now."

Hawks's heart sank. He had a feeling he now knew another reason how their future Hero Society collapsed.

After all, what better way to show the crimes of the new Number One Hero than reveal he'd pushed his eldest son to villainy?

XXXXXXX

Ennea let the bugs think Hawks was sleeping on the couch and made an appearance that night with Hawks spectating. Acting as a Vigilante shot him straight into the clutches of stomach-twisting anxiety but pretending he was merely watching a movie and that he would *not* be sent straight to remedial courses if they were caught helped him cope.

Any worries that White would use his recognizable Quirk were unfounded. Ennea went after a corrupt businessman first and White just needed his fists. They left him near the station with so much evidence his money would not be able to get him off with a mere slap to the wrist again.

And if a little girl and boy were relieved when their abusive father did not come home that night, that was just a bonus.

It was three in the morning by the time Hawks returned to Miruko's apartment. He was so tired he drifted and did not recall where Ennea had stored their costume and equipment, though he did not particularly care.

He silently returned to the couch as Red murmured she'd stopped interfering with the bugs using… whatever that device was that she made. He wanted to go to sleep but unfortunately the voices were more awake than him. They probably had a lot of energy stored up, being stuck in his head and all, but his body needed sleep, darn it. Like kids who had sugar, the voices failed to realize that as they chattered away.

"Okay, so what did we learn?" Pink asked.

"*The Commission are stalkers."* Yellow said.

"*We already knew that."*

"*The Commission are the worst."*

"*Already knew that too."*

"*The Commission are assho—"*

Could you let that go, please? Hawks thought drowsily.

"***No**."* Eight voices said.

But I don't wanna think about them…

Green came to his rescue. *"Purple's Quirk is activated through a feather touching the target and the target responding to him. Like with Orange's Quirk, White's won't instantly burn feathers as long as he keeps the fire going. I bet that'll be how you cancel your Quirk too, Pink."*

"*So all our Quirks use up feathers?"* Red questioned.

"*Theoretically."*

"*Except mine."* Yellow said miserably. *"It just knocks us out if I use it to make too big of a shock."*

Yay, we learned things, Hawks thought tiredly. *Now can I sleep please? Tired.*

Guilt and amusement swirled together, the latter outweighing the former. If Ennea's outings improved their mood so much, perhaps Hawks should let them have control more often. No, that wasn't right. He *should* let them have control more often, period.

"*Go to sleep, Gold."* Pink said quietly. *"You deserve some rest."*

Hawks hummed vaguely and closed his eyes.

He was out like a light.

XXXXXXX

The sky was filled with smoke. It floated through the air with deceptive serenity, wafting dreamily into the atmosphere as though it were ignorant to the hell that lay beneath it. Hawks sprang over a flaming piece of wreckage and scarcely avoided a burst of roiling flames as it hungrily tore through a building. It collapsed before he could reach it and the cooling units in his costume struggled to keep him from boiling inside it.

Another explosion shook the ground and he stumbled, keeping his balance. Blue fire danced on the horizon and his stomach dropped. He ran towards the center of the inferno and activated his communicator.

"Froppy, report."

"Shoto is down." She croaked, voice hoarse and strained from the smoke. *"Tailman is…*" Her usually monotone voice shook. *"He's gone."*

Hawks's eyes filled with tears but he held them back, running as fast as he could. "I'm almost there!" *I'w ãşn't fast enough."* "Just hold on."

Nó. Nó. Dón't make me live this ãgain."

"We will." she promised.

That liar liar Hawks

He heard the roar of flames— harsh and loud and unforgiving— and pushed himself. Faster, faster, *faster*.

Not fast enough.

They had known Dabi was in the area. They had known he'd been alone. They had — *foolishly*— thought they could finally take him out and deprive the Paranormal Liberation Front of one of it's most dangerous lieutenants. Froppy had been the one to put forth the idea

of using a body of water against Dabi. Shoto had been so determined because they had so few opportunities like this. They all had.

He should have gone with them from the start. He should have known better than to think this Dabi was like the one they first saw at the summer camp.

Heroes were not the only ones changed by this war.

Heroes were not the only ones that *snapped*.

When the Heroes caught up to Dabi, his immediate response was to set the entire city ablaze.

Hawks turned a corner and barely dodged an inferno as it exploded in front of him. He reeled back as it faded and the street in front of him was empty. No, not empty.

Shoto was on the ground, breathing harsh and ragged. His left side was covered with burns and Hawks knew it was not because of his own Quirk. Froppy and Tailman were nowhere to be seen. He looked frantically for them as he ran towards Shoto, only for something to crunch beneath his boot.

He reached into the dust and picked up a small, burnt fragment of green goggles, the glass shattered into glittering shards.

Hawks stared uncomprehendingly at the ashes and stumbled over to Shoto. He had to keep him alive. He had to keep at least *one* alive.

So Hawks put the burnt goggles in his pouch, picked up Shoto, and ran like he never had before.

No one else was around to hear him as he wept.

Hawks opened his eyes to a white ceiling.

"It wasn't your fault, Tenya." Green said unsteadily. *"I'm the one who decided to send you to keep an eye out for Shigaraki and the others."*

Silver said nothing, but his grief was as sharp as Hawks's own.

*"None of us realized how… **unrestrained** Dabi became at that point."* Pink added. *"We expected a Villain who had to hold back for at least his own self-preservation."*

"Instead we got one who could now burn the whole world down and didn't care if he went with it." Orange snarled.

White was dead silent. Ghostly fingers brushed the left side of Hawks's face, but he knew it was not actually him feeling it.

Hawks swallowed. *It won't happen again.*

"No," Silver agreed, and his voice was cold as steel. *"It won't."*

XXXXXXX

Uraraka stood by a window with the blinds drawn up, staring out into the infinite darkness outside. She wondered if this was what it was like for astronauts out in space, though space had plenty of stars and planets to fill the endless void. It was nice to be able to think again without her every thought being shared. And she had a lot to think about.

Yaoyorozu sat on the conjured couch behind her but the boys were nowhere in sight. Their 'UA dorms' had expanded considerably to include the girls' own area, but the outside 'world' was still empty. She and Yaoyorozu were the only ones there now. The emptiness was just another reminder of who they lost.

Uraraka shut her eyes to block out the sight of the void and was relieved when she did not see Tsuyu's broken goggles. She missed seeing the sky with her own eyes. She missed being able to hear with her own ears. She missed living without the lingering threat of their walls collapsing. But nothing could be done to change that at the moment.

When they came up with this plan, her first thought was she'd be able to see her family again.

Now she could not even walk on her own feet. She could not see her family or friends, and if she somehow did, they would not recognize her. She could not walk up to her mother and be hugged and welcomed home. Maybe she could try— try to go, try to explain, try to convince them it was her, their daughter, inside this stranger's body— but she could not ask more of Hawks. She couldn't demand he give herself and the others more time in control. Not when there was so little time and so many of them.

And not when he'd give more and more if they asked until he had nothing left.

Did he even realize that he felt guilty for *having control of his own body?* Probably not. The Commission had been very thorough in their attempts to squash 'selfish' thoughts out of him like the desire to *live* and *not* sacrifice every piece of himself for the sake of others. The voices had a mission, but if that mission required them to take all Hawks had left to call his own, she knew they all would be unable to call themselves Heroes anymore if they did it.

It would be so much simpler if things went as planned. Why did things have to end up like this?

Uraraka abruptly turned away from the void outside. "How have you been doing?"

"You cannot tell? I suppose that is an improvement." Yaoyorozu smiled tiredly. "I am coping as well as can be expected considering our circumstances. I am… *concerned* for our visit to UA, however."

Uraraka did not need an open connection between them to know what she was thinking. She sat beside Yaoyorozu and touched her hand with her curled finger's knuckles rather than her fingertips, even though she was uncertain her Quirk would work in here.

"You're worried we'll see Jiro when we drop off Eri this week."

Yaoyorozu's shoulders tensed and she pulled her hand away from Uraraka's. Uraraka understood her reservations. She was not sure that she could handle seeing Tsuyu after Hawks's latest memory-nightmare. But she also knew that Jiro's death was much more personal for Yaoyorozu.

Tsuyu had died to Dabi's flames.

Yaoyorozu had been the one forced to kill Jiro's Nomu herself.

"Her capture wasn't your fault." Uraraka stated. She hesitated, but forced herself to say what she had to. "Her death was *not* your—"

Yaoyorozu's skin turned ashen. As Uraraka watched, her form shimmered like the conjured image it was, revealing flickers of the damage Yaoyorozu tried to hide. Despite the scars creeping across her like bloody shadows, her voice was stoic.

"She hung back to give me time to escape. If I hadn't been distracted when she said to go ahead and stayed with her—"

"We would have lost you both." Uraraka interjected softly. "You were facing Compress, Toga, *and* the Nomu of Edgeshot and Kamui Woods. Jiro saw an opportunity to get you out and she took it."

"Well she shouldn't have made that choice *for me*." Yaoyorozu snapped. She stood abruptly and forced a smile. "We are simply moving Eri to Aizawa's new apartment at UA. It is unlikely we will see any students. But even if we see Jiro, I'll be fine. I won't let my emotions compromise us."

"'Letting' usually isn't part of the equation." Uraraka mentioned.

Red, smoke-like shadows flickered around Yaoyorozu and she walked out, shutting the door to her room shut behind her. The door was closed gently, but cracks spread like spiderwebs through the walls.

Hawks's No Good, Awful, Very Bad Day

Ennea was on patrol again, this time with Pink at the helm. Her joy at being able to have a body and use her Quirk again was strong enough that Hawks could almost forget her freedom left him trapped in what was essentially a void. He fervently clung to her emotions and thoughts to keep himself from panicking and let it infect him, forcing himself to relax as Ennea floated themself up the side of a building and landed at the top.

"*See anything?"* Pink asked giddily.

"*Mugging. Third street over."* White said instantly.

Ennea launched themself from the building and landed lightly between three muggers and their intended victim. One came at them with a knife but Ennea grabbed it, twisting their hand to make him release the weapon and kneeing him in the gut. A light toss sent him into his fellow criminals, bowling them all over. The would-be victim stammered a thanks and ran towards safer streets. Pink winced as Ennea tied the criminals up.

"*I didn't mean to throw them that hard."*

"*We're all stronger than we think."* Red noted.

"*Then we shall have to adjust to this strength to make sure we do not cause any needless harm."* Silver declared.

"*Why are we so strong though?*" Purple questioned as Ennea dumped the tied-up criminals in front of a police station. *"Gold's Quirk doesn't give him super-strength—"*

"*I'm an idiot."* Green breathed.

"*Glad you finally realized it, nerd."* Orange snorted.

"*Haha."* Green said sarcastically, but his voice trembled. *"I think we might have One For All."*

"*And now you're stating the obvious."* Orange sighed. *"What a shame. You lost your last brain cells."*

"*No. I mean I think we might have the stockpiling and* ***Quirk-enhancing*** *aspects."*

Ennea halted in place on edge of a rooftop. They flailed and nearly tipped over but kept their balance. Pink sat them down to prevent any incidents.

Explain? Hawks demanded.

"*One For All gets stronger with each new user."* Green explained. *"And so it makes the Quirks within it stronger too."*

"*But we don't have One For All like that."* Yellow objected. *"All Might and mini-you do. There can only be one user at a time or the predecessor slowly loses the Quirk's power to give it to the successor."*

"*Except **I'm** the predecessor."* Green stated. *"And I'm in Hawks's head with the rest of you. Hawks who… **might** be the successor? Kind of?"*

"*Are you trying to say Hawks has One For All?"* White demanded. *"As in the transferable stockpiling Quirk One For All?"*

"*I… Maybe. There's only one way to find out."* Hawks could feel Green's nervousness. *"We need to test One For All."*

Hawks shoved down a bundle of nerves. *So you want me to give you, Lord Bone Breaker, control and see if my bones break?*

"*We have to try One For All eventually."* Green said, frustration growing. *"Maybe if we— I don't know— try to use feathers off your wings it won't be so—"*

*I still have **bones** in my wings, Lord Bone Breaker.*

"*Will you stop calling me that?"*

Never , Lord Bone Breaker, Breaker of Bones. It is only right that I call you by your rightfully earned title.

Green sighed. *"What if I try another, less bone-breaking Quirk?*"

Hawks considered it. *That may suffice, Lord Bone Breaker.*

"*Will you please—?"*

No.

Green sighed but Hawks could tell he was being carefully scrutinized. *"It's up to you, Gold."*

Hawks got vague flickers of mangled limbs and gulped. *No time like the present.*

Pink stood back and Green took control. Hawks and the remaining voices dithered anxiously as they felt Green focus. They did not feel anything yet, but they all braced for pain.

None came.

Green frowned at Ennea's hands and flicked their fingers.

He did it again.

Then again.

"*...Did anyone else expect this to be more dramatic?*" Yellow mentioned.

"***Yes**."* Green said shakily. *"I don't have Black Whip. Hold on."*

Whatever he tried to do, apparently it did not work because his next thought was of frustrated alarm.

"*I only have One For All's strength, speed, and agility enhancements. The rest of the previous holders' Quirks seem to be gone. Black Whip, Float… They're **not here**. But it's like something **else** is missing… Like I can't access the full power?"*

Hawks should probably be less relieved by that last bit of news. He did not want broken bones, thank you very much.

"*Makes sense."* Purple said slowly. *"It's not like the vestiges are in here with us."*

"*Are **we** the vestiges now?"* Yellow asked, voice low with horror.

Green's helplessness lashed at Hawks. *"I… don't think so?"*

A thought struck Hawks. *Wait, if you had the vestiges of the previous One For All users, shouldn't All Might have—*

"*No."* Green interrupted sharply. *"There wasn't eno— ...**No**."* He took a breath. *"I guess I was wrong. Simple physical enhancements it is then."*

Hawks did not press the issue. Green silently gave control back to Pink and Ennea continued their patrol. They all decided to not acknowledge Green's feelings of helpless unease.

XXXXXXX

It was Friday, and in the case of this particular Friday, moving day. Or 'moving evening' to be more specific since it was in the afternoon, early enough Hawks had returned home to clean up before heading to UA.

Eri should be on her way there now with Aizawa and an escort of Heroes. Hawks had intended to be part of that group, but he'd been sent a murder investigation from the Commission themselves yesterday. He couldn't exactly say 'Hey, I need to ditch this investigation for a few hours and leave early to guard a little girl with a special Quirk that would definitely interest you so please ignore that last part.', and he didn't want to. The less the Commission's attention was drawn to Eri, the better.

And so Hawks pulled another all-nighter and left as early as he dared on Friday. As he zoomed around the apartment and tried to calculate where the escort should be on its route by now, he quickly made himself another cup of coffee and chugged half of it, hoping the caffeine would pull him through.

"*You've been drinking more coffee than usual."* Green mentioned.

I'm tired and I need the energy. You know why.

Ennea had been out every night that week except last night, so yes, they certainly did. It sucked that most of his free time consisted of time he should be sleeping, but what else was he supposed to do? Suspiciously take a day off so Ennea could run around in the daytime? That would *definitely* end well.

"*Still, relying on caffeine is not healthy."* Silver scolded.

What else am I supposed to do?

Hawks got the impression of someone shrugging helplessly. He considered his nearly-empty mug and set it on the countertop. He moved a feather from his wings so it just barely touched the mug's handle.

Pink, may I?

"*Go ahead.*"

Hawks felt Pink's presence strengthen and he closed his eyes, focusing on the feather. The slosh of shifting liquid alerted him and he opened them to see the mug floating serenely upward. Hawks took the feather away and it continued to levitate, though much more slowly. He brought the feather to his hand and broke it, used to the strange twinge the breakage brought. The cup clattered to the countertop and a bit of coffee sloshed out.

Cool.

"*I can't believe we didn't figure this out sooner."* Orange scoffed, disgusted with them all.

"*In our defense, we kinda forgot to factor in the 'detached feathers don't return if damaged' aspect of Gold's Quirk."* Green mentioned.

Hawks's cell phone rang. He saw Aizawa's number and was already heading towards the window as he answered. "Is something wrong?"

"*No."* Aizawa reassured him. *"We'll be arriving at UA soon."*

"How soon?"

"*Ten minutes."*

"I'm en route." Hawks said instantly. He dropped his mug in the sink and went out the window, taking to the air. He transferred the call to his headphones so he could hear. "Anything suspicious?"

"*Nothing yet."*

The limited information frustrated Hawks. His lips twisted into a frown. "I should be in the escort."

"*You were busy with that murder case—"*

"Not busy enough that I couldn't be there for Eri—" Hawks realized he had interrupted the other Pro Hero and winced. "Sorry for arguing, sir. You're right. I know my mission."

"*Hm."* Aizawa said, which Hawks knew was Aizawa-speak for 'I disagree but I don't think you'll understand why so I'm not going to argue with you'. He scowled at the sky, but the source of his ire could not see it. *"So you are aware: When we arrive, a couple of students will be helping."* Aizawa lowered his voice. *"They will be around a lot and I'd like Eri to get used to them."*

Red's panic nearly choked Hawks. He plummeted a few feet, caught himself, and cleared his throat.

"Okay. Thanks for the heads up." *Red? You okay?*

"*I'm fine— Oh, why am I bothering to pretend? Pink..."*

"*She's afraid we'll see Jiro."* Pink explained for her.

Ah.

"*The school day will be over by the time we arrive. It's very unlikely she will be there."* Yellow soothed Red. Just the smallest bit of grief clouded his presence, showing he too might be a bit off-kilter if they unexpectedly ran into their previously— er, future?— Nomu-turned friend. *"And if we do see her, remember she's **alive**."*

"*That's true."* Red murmured. *"But I think I'm going to remain cut off for this one. I... I'm not ready."*

"*I'm going to hang back too."* Yellow added abruptly.

Okay.

He felt them retreat, leaving him with six voices to converse with.

"*Hawks, are you still there?"*

Oh. Aizawa was still on the line. Oops.

"I'm here." Hawks said breezily. "Anything?"

"*Noth—"*

BOOM.

The sound of an explosion and screeching tires was all Hawks needed to hear. He shot through the sky, distorting the air behind him as he flew at breakneck speeds. He distantly felt Red and Yellow reemerge, drawn out by his and the others' combined sense of urgency.

They should have known Overhaul would try something. They should have known he would not remain silent forever. They should have known *they should have known **they should have***

KNOWN—

As the world faded into a blur and rushing air, Green's voice came clearly to Hawks as if they were his own thoughts.

"Overhaul overly relies on his Quirk, which allows him to disassemble and reassemble things with a touch of his bare hands. He's not that big of a hand to hand fighter— he actually freaks out when people touch him— but he can heal the damage he takes. Keep your distance."

"Or just beat the shit out of him." Orange snarled. *"He's slower than us and can't take too many hits. Plus some of his underlings might take the blow if you try long distance fighting."*

"You actually listened when I told you about him?" Green asked, surprise clear in his voice.

"Of course I did! I wanted to beat that bastard to paste if he came back for Eri."

Was he talking about this timeline or theirs? It didn't matter now. Overhaul had made his move, and Hawks arrived at the scene.

The car was a totaled wreck of crumpled metal. Two other cars smoked near them, one of them tipped onto it's side. Someone unidentifiable was nothing more than a splatter of blood and body parts on the road. Hawks knew it was not from the crash.

Eraserhead crouched behind the sideways car with Eri in his arms. Beside him was a white-cloaked Hero, Suneater, which meant Fatgum was likely nearby because Amajiki was still a student.

Hawks and the voices' attention snapped away from the ones seeking refuge, zeroing in on the brown-haired man standing carelessly in the center of the street as the few remaining civilians fled. Hawks absently hurried their escape with his feathers, but the action felt rather detached, as if he were on autopilot.

He only had attention on *him*.

Hawks did not need to see the plague mask he wore to recognize him on sight. He looked just like he had years ago during their fight when he was just a first-year student at UA.

Overhaul was speaking, he realized. He faced towards the car where Eri hid, unconcerned by the violence around him as the Expendables fought the other Heroes, including Fatgum. None of them seemed to notice Hawks had arrived. One advantage of people barely looking up, he supposed somewhere in the detached portion of his mind. Hawks should be more aware of what they were doing but he could not divert his attention from Overhaul.

"And now a Hero is dead because you did not come with me when I asked so nicely. *Look at what you did*, Eri—"

Hawks's sharp gaze snapped to Eri, and he saw her crying.

Shaking.

Afraid.

Worst of all, it was clear she was trying to get out of Aizawa's arms and *go to Overhaul*.

Hawks's mind went strangely quiet, like the calm before the storm.

Only Green's voice came to him, eerily serene. *"Beat the shit out of him."*

Hawks did not waste any more time. He just *attacked*.

Feathers slammed into Overhaul with extreme prejudice. One went straight into his eye and he shrieked in pain. Hawks watched Overhaul yank the feather out with a scream. Giving him no time to remove his gloves, Hawks smashed into Overhaul feet first. The yakuza's remaining eye dilated with pain but Hawks did not let up.

A fist broke Overhaul's nose in a spurt of blood. Hawks flitted back just long enough to be sure Overhaul's gloves were still on and shot in again, knee connecting with the yakuza's solar plexus.

Something moved in Hawks's *stretched* awareness and he grabbed Overhaul, yanking him in the way. The bullet struck the Shie Hassaikai leader instead and Chronostasis cried out in horror. A swarm of feathers— more like wasps than fluff— forced Overhaul's second in command away. Hawks must be hallucinating because he thought he saw glints of metal in the swarm.

It did not matter.

Only Overhaul did.

*You're **never** taking her again.*

Hawks's veins burst into flames, but they hardly felt the pain. For every one hit Overhaul attempted— and it looked like *someone* got hit by a bullet that temporarily erased their Quirk.
How *unfortunate*.— Hawks got four successful strikes. He gave Overhaul no time to retaliate. Not a *second*.

Because Kai Chisaki and his men would never touch that little girl again.

A golden filter slid over Hawks's vision and—

Crunch.

They broke one of Overhaul's arms. They should remove it completely but doing so would be unheroic and cutting or ripping an arm off was too close to torture for their liking. They knew what it was like from experience, and besides, they were a Hero. Heroes did not maim people and they were a Hero as they always dreamed.

But this bastard deserved it. He *deserved it* for hurting Eri. He hurt her. He tortured her.
He *killed* her. He traumatized her so much she ran into their extra room at Aizawa's

apartment after having nightmares and *she could not even smile* until—

They felt movement around their swarm of feathers and knocked out the Expendable behind them before he could even raise his katana. They felt more movement and realized Chronostasis was trying to attack them. The attack was so slow to them, they were almost tempted to watch its path, following it with gold-filmed vision. But they would not be distracted from *their* target.

A feather intercepted, slicing the arrow-like hair clean off as it knocked the plague mask off Chronostasis's face. If Chronostasis screamed in pain, they barely registered it. *No one* would be allowed to interfere. This was the monster that hurt Eri. This was the *beast* that tortured a little girl. He would not escape them. He would not hurt her again. *Never again.*

Pressure built in their wings and their hand raised as golden energy washed over their vision like a film of flickering lightning—

Their vision wavered, sliding like the world would not stay still. Like they were *drunk*. Fury ignited their veins and their feather struck the drinking man right in the temple. He fell from his perch on a building and into a crumpled heap on the ground.

They turned back and Overhaul was running. The *monster* glanced back and his eyes were wide with fear. He should have known better than to try to run from a bird of prey. Even with his speed hindered, they were incredibly fast. A feather struck Overhaul's head, and his body jolted once before he slumped.

"*Chisaki!*" Chronostasis screamed.

The horrified pain in his voice may have stirred something in them if they did not know he was worried for a *monster*. Overhaul did not rise, successfully knocked out via a brief electric pulse, and they looked at the remaining members of the Shie Hassaikai, considering their options.

Chronostasis looked back, and the color drained from his face. He took a step back, then two, then turned.

"Fall back!"

The remaining Expendables startled, but obeyed. A part of them was surprised Overhaul's guards were fleeing. They thought the yakuza members were more loyal then that, but a part of them deduced they likely thought they would be able to rescue Overhaul at a later time.

They would not allow that to happen. To them, the Shie Hassaikai seemed to be running in slow motion. They watched each painfully slow pace and raised their hand as feathers flitted at their shoulders, aiming like spears—

The feathers froze in midair and fell to the ground. They felt a brief flash of confusion—what was Aizawa-sensei doing?— but it barely lasted a second. Their wings would not move and they could not fly so they ran after the yakuza like lions after terrified gazelles.

Something wrapped around their wrist and they almost ignited to burn it away before they realized they could not. Why was Aizawa-sensei stopping them? They turned to stare at him, not glaring, but questioning.

Aizawa's eyes glowed red and his hair floated, but they could see he was straining himself. "That's enough, Hawks. Any more and you might kill them."

A part of them were hurt by their beloved sensei's words. Did he not trust them? Why?

"Not kill." They said. "Not maim. Not even them."

Aizawa-sensei put a hand on their shoulder. "You need to calm down."

They did not understand. They *were* calm. They were in control. Why was he stopping them? The Shie Hassaikai were right there—

The other Shie Hassaikai were gone. They moved to pursue but Aizawa-sensei did not release them. They were not his students anymore. They could protect themselves. So *why* did he stop them?

"Must secure enemies." they hissed. "Won't let them hurt Eri again."

"I know." Aizawa-sensei said calmly. "You've done enough for today. You've captured their leader."

They looked and saw Overhaul, Rikiya Katsukame, Toya Setsuno, Yu Hojo, Soramitsu Tabe, and Deidoro Sakaki in cuffs, being hauled away. Chronostasis, Mimic, Kendo Rappa, Shin Nemoto, and Hekiji Tengai had escaped, but Eri's main abuser had been caught.

The golden tint faded.

Hawks stared at his shaking hands. His knees buckled and smacked into the pavement, sending jolts of pain up his thighs. Neither he nor the voices noticed as they sat in stunned silence.

"What was that?"

"That's what I would like to know." Eraserhead said neutrally.

Hawks slowly looked up at him, forcing himself to keep a blank expression. His worry for himself vanished and he looked around wildly for Eri. He spotted her in Suneater's arms and relaxed. Overhaul had not taken her. They were so glad—

They?

Hawks only had a second to realize the walls were *gone*.

Then white-hot pain lanced through his head, blinding him.

It was like the past months never happened. All he could do was drown in the well of emotions and thoughts and screams that might be his own but also weren't. There were a lot more voices screaming than usual, and he eventually realized he was not alone outside of his body either. He realized something was clasped around his wrists and terror nearly stopped his heart.

He'd been captured.

He'd been *captured*—

He—

"—He's having another seizure!"

"We're almost there. Tell Toshinori to—"

~~Scream~~ ~~pain~~ ~~couldn't see~~ ~~couldn't breathe~~ ~~couldn't feel his body~~—

In the blurs of rioting color, he thought he saw Aizawa-sensei's distorted face, surrounded by black mist. His eyes were gone. Bloody holes were all that remained.

They might have screamed. Then they— *he. He he he he* ***HE***— *he* definitely screamed as fire caressed their cheek.

Aizawa-sensei's face blurred and his eyes were back, glowing red. No trickles of blood stained his cheeks. No black mist surrounded his face. His dark hair brushed Hawks's face, leaving fire where it touched.

"Hawks, can you hear me?" he said clearly. "We're getting you to help."

Hawks. He was *Hawks*. Aizawa was *not* his sensei. He—

Wait.

'Help'?

...Were they taking him to a *hospital*?

No. *No*. They could not be taken to the hospital. If they— If *he* was admitted, they— *he. HE.* He was *him* not them. If *he* was admitted, he would be forced to leave Eri's side. He couldn't let her die again. He struggled and tried to beat his wings to give himself some leverage but someone huge pinned him down. He might have tried to tell them that he needed to find Eri but he was not sure he spoke.

His head split apart and he inhaled, only to feel drowsy. He blinked, and realized his vision was not blurry, but *misty*. He felt so tired. He could not lift his arms anymore. There was mist around him. It must be sleeping gas.

That meant only one thing.

Midnight's Nomu was here.

No.

A gas mask. He had to… make a gas mask.

He could not lift his hands. They were too heavy.

His eyes were too heavy, too…

Hawks mercifully blacked out.

XXXXXXX

Aizawa strode across the staff room, opened the cabinet, took out two aspirin, and swallowed them dry.

That done, he dragged a hand down his face and walked right back out, not stopping to acknowledge Midnight as she called out to him. He had no time to linger. Not when Hawks could wake at any moment. So he headed back to Recovery Girl's office. Usually it was a place for banged up students. Now, it served as an impromptu hospital.

Or a prison.

Aizawa acknowledged that thought but did not linger on it. It would be illogical to before they learned the full situation. Hawks had done nothing wrong unless spontaneously showing abilities he never showed before had become a crime. Those like All Might may think him cruel for his thoughts but the fact was something wasn't right with the Winged Hero.

First of all, last Aizawa knew, Fierce Wings did not make him *glow with golden light*. Even when he activated Erasure, the glow in Hawks's eyes remained, covering his sclera, irises, and pupils in a layer of gold.

Second of all, the way Hawks took on the Shie Hassaikai was… troubling. Even in his report, Aizawa could only describe Hawks's actions as "forcefully efficient". Reports were not for speculation, so he left out his theory that Hawks had not been in control during that fight. And not in terms of power, for his every action had been steadily moderate, neither going too far or not far enough.

Even his breakage of Chisaki's arm had, from a point of view, been logical since Aizawa had seen what he'd done to one of Fatgum's sidekicks. He had not looked up their name yet, not ready to add another name to the list of people he'd failed. For now, he focused on the living.

Hawks actions had been efficient and controlled, yes, but at the same time there was something definitely *wrong* and almost *feral* about him during that fight, like he were a wild bird protecting its nest. Aizawa may be inclined to believe Hawks had some territorial instincts but truthfully his reaction screamed 'trauma' more than 'Quirk-related mental state'.

Theoretically, Hawks's Quirk could have awakened— or had been previously held back by some personal trauma— but surely he would have done that already? From what All Might

had passed on to Aizawa and Nedzu from Tsukauchi— and Aizawa was *not* thinking about that now too along with everything else— the Commission would accept nothing less. So a new, unexplained aspect of Fierce Wings was possible, but unlikely.

Aizawa disliked the other options, to say the least.

Still, the benefit of the doubt was necessary to consider. Hawks looked as shocked as the witnesses. Not to mention he'd begun *seizing*. And possibly hallucinating if his horrified looks when he looked at Aizawa were any indication. Midnight had been forced to sedate him with her Quirk, which got her a literal smack on the wrist from an irate Recovery Girl.

Indeed, they took him to UA and Recovery Girl, the closest safe location and where the students were absent and All Might was if he was needed. Fatgum and his team lingered too, and while the logical part of Aizawa acknowledged that the BMI Hero may be a good counter to Hawks should he need to be restrained, he could not get the image of the young Hero's convulsing body out of his mind.

Aizawa's compassion stirred and he could already hear Present Mic teasing him about it. Eri was with him now, and had been a *bit* too agreeable when the man told her she could call him 'Uncle Mic'. She only needed to be told that Aizawa needed to help Hawks for her to run to a stranger's side and agree to stay with them. There would be a time to deal with that worrying habit, but now was not it.

Hawks was stable, but still unconscious. Recovery Girl had vetoed taking him to a hospital just yet for reasons she refused to share with Aizawa. He suspected it may be due to who *else* would find out Hawks was there if he was admitted. All tests for drugs and other poisons came up negative. Hawks had not been hit with Trigger or another Quirk-enhancer. As far as Recovery Girl and those tests could tell, there was no external factor responsible for his seizures. That was both a relief and the last thing a Aizawa wanted to hear.

He could only thank a higher power that no civilians or cameras had witnessed the incident. It would have been plastered on the internet within the hour if someone had. Apparently a bunch of technology had gone haywire right after Overhaul and his men attacked. Aizawa made a mental note to check to see if any of the yakuza had a technology-blocking Quirk.

Aizawa halted outside of Hawks's room where Snipe, Fatgum, and Suneater stood guard. The youngest of the three looked so far out of his depth Aizawa was genuinely worried he might have a breakdown. He felt a bit of sympathy for the kid. Amajiki was one of the Big Three and would graduate within a year, but he was still a student. Yet he had been thrown into something he never expected. Hell, he'd been thrown into something *none* of them had expected.

"Anything?" Aizawa asked.

"He's still unconscious." Snipe reported. "Hasn't even twitched."

Aizawa nodded in acknowledgment and went back into the room. Fatgum silently followed and closed the door behind them. They both sat in the available chairs and continued to wait. It was around one in the morning by now. Eri was hopefully asleep and in her bed.

She was supposed to be greeted by the faculty and a few students, all welcoming her to UA. She was supposed to be shown around by an enthusiastic Mic. She was supposed to be reassured by Hawks and tucked in by Aizawa, certain everything was okay and safe.

Instead Overhaul had attacked. Instead, Hawks had defeated him, but ended up convulsing on the ground. Instead, the students had been ordered to go home, no arguments, and rushed out before their team could arrive. Instead, Hawks was unconscious and Aizawa stood guard over him, ready to nullify a possibly-unstable Quirk.

Aizawa had been prepared for things to not go according to plan.

He just did not expect things to go so badly.

A tentative knock did not draw his attention away from Hawks, because he had to be ready.

Fatgum answered in his stead, and Midnight poked her head in.

"Mic texted me. Apparently Shoto's still awake. He's wondering if he can come back tomorrow. Well..." She looked at the clock. "Later this morning, I guess."

The headache Aizawa had was unaffected by the aspirin he'd taken. He resisted the desire to put a hand over his eyes, keeping his sights on Hawks's unmoving form. "Tell him it's uncertain but possible. Regardless, Eri would love to see him when she is able."

Midnight nodded slowly and glanced at Hawks. "Is Recovery Girl sure we shouldn't move him?"

"Yes." Aizawa said, tone clipped.

Her blue eyes narrowed slightly. "But we usually only keep staff and students here."

"Hawks was on a UA-sanctioned mission when he was… injured. He will remain here."

He could feel her gaze on him. "Does this have to do with the application?"

Aizawa forced himself not to glare at her because at least she showed *some* discretion. If she asked outright if this had to do with All Might's worrisome discovery about the Hero Public Safety Commission, he might think she was an impostor. Nemuri would never be so careless and mention it in front of an outsider.

"Perhaps." he said neutrally.

It was only because he was watching Hawks so closely that he saw his eyelids twitch. He stood up, hair floating, and Midnight instantly backed out of the room. Fatgum also stood, movements slow but deliberate, but Hawks did not snap awake and sit up.

Golden eyes fluttered open and remained fixed on the ceiling. Aizawa waited for them to travel around the room and see him and Fatgum but they did not move. He slowly realized his initial assumption was incorrect. Hawks was not focused on the ceiling. He likely did not see it at all. Just to be certain, Aizawa called his name.

"Hawks?"

No reaction.

"Hawks, can you hear me?"

Still no reaction.

Midnight came back with Recovery Girl a minute later. Toshinori Yagi hurried in right after her and Aizawa stifled an annoyed glower. Did All Might not know the definition of 'discreet'? Thankfully, Fatgum did not question why All Might's 'secretary' was at UA.

Recovery Girl asked Hawks a few questions and, upon receiving no answer, began to check his vitals. Aizawa watched the proceedings carefully, keeping his eyes peeled for any sign of a golden glow. None came, and Hawks remained as unresponsive as a doll as she checked him over. Finally she stepped back, lips pressed thin.

"Is he catatonic?" Aizawa asked, dreading the answer.

She eyed him neutrally. "From what Toshinori has said, Hawks may simply be— as he puts it — 'sunk into his head.'"

It was a non-answer if he ever heard one. "And how would *you* put it?" Aizawa asked the nurse in a level tone.

She jabbed him in the leg with her cane. "Nothing I'll share with you. You're not his family."

"He doesn't have a family." Toshinori said softly. "Except for young Miruko, of course."

Recovery Girl's thin eyebrows rose. "Please tell me you called her."

As they shuffled their feet and avoided her eyes, she smacked Toshinori in the shins.

"*Call her*, idiot!"

Toshinori stammered an apology and hurried out, yanking out his phone as he went. Hawks did not notice. He continued to stare at the ceiling, so still and vacant that if not for the beeping of the heart monitor and the movement of his chest, Aizawa may think he was dead. Recovery Girl continued to speak to him. She received no response, even when she touched his arm. Aizawa did not look away for a second.

A few minutes later, another tentative tap interrupted his vigil. Suneater leaned into the doorway, visibly unnerved.

"The Rabbit Hero, Miruko, is outside. She's threatening to kick the security doors down."

"Well, *let her in*." Recovery Girl snapped.

Suneater winced and hurried away.

The pounding of feet was the only warning they got before Miruko shoved the door open and rushed to the bed, dragging a poor Suneater with her. She caught sight of Hawks and released the intern.

In her hurry to reach Hawks's side, she nearly knocked the sturdy and immovable Fatgum into the wall. Or through the wall, considering he left a dent. In another setting, Aizawa might be impressed. She was certainly stronger than she looked, though that should be expected from the Number Five Hero.

Miruko sat on the bed next to Hawks and cupped his face with her hands.

"Hawks. Hey. Baby Bird, it's me." She forced a smile and brushed a lock of hair away from his face. "I'm here. You doing okay in there?"

Hawks did not respond. Miruko's ears drooped and her hands fell to her sides. Her shoulders shook and for a moment, Aizawa thought she might cry. Then she raised her head, revealing furious red eyes.

"What the *hell* happened?"

Aizawa knew what was going to happen, but gladly put himself forward as the target. "Our mission's details are classifi—"

"Oho*ho*, you do *not* want to pull that shit with me right now." Miruko breathed. "I know about 'Starling'. Hawks will fill me in on what happened anyway. Tell me what happened."

Aizawa did not respond. She was not his superior, and he had no reason to tell her the details. He and Miruko glowered at each other as they refused to back down, eyes burning red.

Fatgum put a hand on her arm, either to comfort or perhaps restrain her. "Hawks appeared to overload his Quirk. When he deactivated it, he began convulsing."

Miruko paled. "He hasn't been sleeping much lately. And I kept seeing him take aspirin. He said he had headaches. He's had them since he came back."

"Headaches or migraines?" Recovery Girl questioned.

"Probably migraines. He tends to downplay how much pain he's in. The fact that he *told m*e he was in pain tells me it was excruciating."

Recovery Girl's elderly features seemed to age another hundred years in an instant. "He may need an MRI scan."

"Do you have the equipment here?" Miruko asked. "Hawks wouldn't want to be taken to the hospital like… this." She looked at him, then away, her hair falling into her face. "If the Commission sees him like this I don't know what they'll do to him."

And *that* was why the staff of UA was so hesitant to bring Hawks to a public hospital. Suspicious Quirk usage or not, Hawks had enough problems. He did not need the Commission to become involved. Which was why that little detail was supposed to remain

between the UA faculty, Miruko, an Underground Hero All Might refused to name, and Tsukauchi.

Apparently Miruko did not care about being discreet. Still, Taishiro Toyomitsu was a trustworthy soul and an honest Hero. The chances of him secretly being on the Commission's payroll were slim to none.

Aizawa finally turned away from Hawks to lock eyes with the BMI Hero, gauging his reaction. "The Commission bought Hawks, groomed him to be a Hero, and keep him in their employ using… *concerning* methods. We have plans to remove him from the situation."

Fatgum's cold expression could turn the sun to ice. "I see. If you need any assistance, tell me."

Aizawa acknowledged that with a curt nod and turned back to Hawks. He was beginning to suspect his Quirk might not be needed, but it was better safe than sorry.

"I don't have all the equipment." Recovery Girl answered Miruko. "This office is not built for long-term patients."

"*It's not meant for long-term patients with possible neurological disorders."* went unsaid.

As she and Miruko began discussing the options, Toshinori stepped close to Aizawa and kept his voice low. "This is… unsettling." he admitted quietly. "I witnessed an episode like this but it was nowhere near as bad as this one."

"You did?" Miruko asked, audibly confused.

Toshinori froze, and Aizawa realized he had seen an episode as *All Might*. His coworker could truly be the Symbol of Stupidity at times.

"Oh, right." Miruko said before Toshinori could do more than hum nervously. "You were there at…" She glanced around and Aizawa realized she was looking for cameras. "…his friend's place before I arrived." She looked back at Hawks and her shoulders slumped. "How long will this last?"

"Could be minutes, hours, or days." Recovery Girl said bluntly but not unkindly. "We'll get a clearer picture once we have an MRI."

Miruko bit her lip.

"Don't give me that look, missy." Recovery Girl continued gruffly. "We're not going to throw him out on the street and expect you to care for him. He can stay here for now, until we know what can be done." She nodded at the other bed. "And that spot's open if you want some sleep."

Miruko stood, jostling the bed Hawks lay on, but he did not react. She bowed deeply. "Thank you."

Toshinori cleared his throat. "The UA staff is in the process of making accommodations for ou— themselves here. I'm sure Midnight has some pajamas you could borrow if you would rather not leave. Or we could send someone to pick up something of yours if you'd prefer that."

"I'll borrow them, thank you." Miruko said briefly. She paused and her eyes narrowed. "I still can't believe they called *you* before me."

The guilty look on Toshinori's face was so blatant Aizawa wondered how he had yet to be discovered. His lying skills were truly abysmal. "Er. Well, you see, All Might was—"

"'ll-Migh'."

Aizawa was not the only one who jumped. Hawks had moved at last. His head was turned towards Toshinori, eyes unblinking, though Aizawa occasionally saw a film flick over his glassy gaze. His lips moved, but other than a few, indecipherable mumbles, he said little, his mouth moving more than it made sounds.

"—lossssst 'er. 'ailed." Tears trickled from his dull eyes. "Fai'urrrrre 'ero. 'ailure. L'st 'em 'll. 'ost 'er. Sh's *dead*."

Aizawa understood that last one. Realization clicked and he moved into Hawks's line of sight. "Hawks, Eri isn't dead."

Hawks stared at him— No, that wasn't right.

He stared *through* Aizawa as if he were not there.

Then his eyes rolled back and he started seizing.

Toshinori froze, Miruko shouted, Suneater turned as white as his cloak, and Aizawa's Quirk activated.

Recovery Girl snapped an order and everyone except Aizawa and the nurse found themselves herded outside by Fatgum. Aizawa saw Miruko claw at his arm as she was lifted by the larger Hero but he did not let go even as the door swung shut behind them.

Only Aizawa and Recovery Girl remained in the room as Hawks went through another seizure and fell unconscious once more without a flicker of golden light to be seen. As he watched UA's nurse professionally check Hawks's vitals and ensure he was not choking on vomit, Aizawa almost envied her calm. He could feel his veneer of composure cracking with every beep of the heart monitor.

None of this was supposed to happen.

None of it.

Yet here they were.

Only one thing was for certain.

They could not let the Commission— or *anyone*— know what had happened today.

XXXXXXX

Even as he lay bound in the back of a prison transport, Kai Chisaki was calm and composed, if slightly annoyed. The Heroes thought they had captured him, but the Shie Hassakai was still free. The diseased Heroes were no closer to finding the yakuza's base than they were before, and Overhaul was confident it would remain that way.

He knew this arrangement was temporary. Chronostasis had done the wise thing and preserved their remaining resources by retreating. His friend would no doubt stage a rescue along with the remaining Precepts. All Overhaul had to do was wait. Once he was free, he would continue as he had. He had no doubt that he would have retrieved Eri if not for that… *thing*.

Quirks were a plague, and that Hero— Hawks— was the most infected one he had ever seen, to the point where the Quirk acted more like a *parasite*. Overhaul feared no Hero and never would— why fear something so *disgusting*?— but that thing was not a Hero, or even *human*. He would have to be careful to avoid it in the future. He knew it existed now, so the unforeseen circumstances that had resulted in his capture would be taken into account for next time… in that it would have to be distracted when the Shie Hassakai made another move.

The truck braked and Overhaul realized they had reached their destination. The two guards came into the back and rolled him out like luggage on a cart. Overhaul sneered at them from behind the muzzle-like gag over his mouth and imagined how satisfying it would be to kill them. They were inside some type of structure that resembled a multi-layer parking lot. It was certainly not what Overhaul expected from Tartarus but he didn't particularly care.

He would not be here for long.

The guards pushed him into the building, where a man in a doctor's coat waited for them. Overhaul had to fight back a glower. So they were taking him to a check up first? Did they think he was diseased like the rest of them?

"Doctor. We brought him as ordered." One guard said.

"Wonderful, wonderful." the bespectacled man said, beckoning them inside. "Leave him here. I'll send reports to the Commission as promised."

The guards pushed Overhaul into the room— a doctor's office— and left. Overhaul watched them go and looked at his new warden with boredom. The man was blatantly nonthreatening, like a rat in the sewer. Disgusting, fat, but easy enough to kill.

The doctor smiled at him. "You know, when I first heard of your Quirk, I so desperately hoped you'd end up in my care. Why, with your Quirk, you could have become the greatest doctor in the world."

Overhaul's disgust tripled. So this man was one of *those* delusional fools. The kind that saw Quirks as a gift and not the plague they were.

"You're very lucky, you know." Said delusional fool continued. "You could have simply stayed in jail, being wasted, but luckily my employers showed some sense and realized your Quirk is too useful to let rot in Tartarus."

The doctor's smile twisted to become as kindly as a vulture's.

It was at that moment Overhaul realized his previous assumptions could not be more wrong.

"It's been a while since I have been granted the chance to perform modifications for this side." the doctor mused. "I almost forgot how wonderful it feels. It almost makes me question why I looked to him for assistance with my research. But then I remember that as open-minded as the Commission may be, they're still blind to the truth." He took in Overhaul's expression and chuckled. "I see you're understanding why I dare to tell you this. Do I need to bother to say you won't remember this conversation? In fact…"

Cold eyes glittered behind thick glasses. "...you won't be able to think anything soon without my permission. You may consider yourself a big fish, Chisaki, but you've grossly overestimated how influential you yakuza are. They will not find you here. All For One himself doesn't know about this facility, and it's run by his oh-so righteous and lawful enemy!"

The doctor took out a device and clamped it around Overhaul's head.

"Oh, and please feel free to scream at any time. Let it all out. No one will hear you."

Something pricked the side of Overhaul's neck and everything went dark.

Shielding

Shoto Todoroki lay in his dark room and stared up at the ceiling. His shades were down, blocking his view of the outside world, but he knew it was still nighttime outside. A glance at his phone revealed it was three in the morning. He had not slept all night, his thoughts too full for him to even attempt to drift off.

Yesterday he was supposed to help Eri at UA. She was moving there with Aizawa for extra security because apparently her Quirk was rather dangerous. Despite the reason for her transfer, Shoto was unashamed to admit he had been looking forward to her arrival, not only because of her but because Hawks would be there as well. He had not worked up the nerve to call his mentor with questions, not wanting to bother him— or risk talking about… family things— but surely he would not mind if they talked face to face? Shoto had hoped not.

He never got to find out yesterday.

Instead, shortly before Eri's group was due to arrive, the teachers had come in and told Shoto and the others they had to leave immediately. Shoto had wanted to stay, but Present Mic's stern expression had sent him packing. If he and the other students did not exit the premises, he had the feeling they would be forced out.

What could have happened, to make the normally jovial Hero look so grave? Shoto spent much of the night trying to figure it out with some assistance from the internet, but the only news article that might be relevant was about the death of a Pro Hero named Mr. Brave.

Some hours later, Shoto gave up on sleep and got up. He put on soft socks that would muffle the sounds of his footsteps and tiptoed out of his room and down the hall. The light in the kitchen was on. He froze, ready to retreat, but spotted Fuyumi at the stove. She tensed and turned, and Shoto tensed as well, falling onto his back foot. But Fuyumi's grey eyes softened, losing the nervous look they'd held just a moment before.

"Good morning, Shoto." she greeted. "I was just making breakfast. It's just the two of us today."

The tension in Shoto's shoulders faded. "Father is not home?"

"No. He remained at his Agency all night."

Apparently Shoto would not have training this morning then. He could not say he was disappointed as he sat at the table with a few less aches than usual. Fuyumi set a plate of food in front of him and another on the opposite side of the table. She sat and they ate in silence.

"How is school?" Fuyumi asked.

"Fine." He felt he should elaborate and did so. "We're studying for our finals now."

She smiled. "Good. That's… good."

The silence returned.

Shoto had enough self-control not to fidget, but he poked at his food, nudging it in circles around his plate. He should not be bothered by the quiet. He used to be more tolerant of it since he was not expected to interact with his siblings, but now it felt stifling. He thought he felt his phone vibrate and took it out of his pocket. The screen showed no new messages so he returned it with a frown. Fuyumi noticed.

"You keep looking at your phone. Is something wrong?"

"I'm waiting for a text." Shoto said honestly.

Fuyumi perked up and clapped her hands together in excitement. "From who? A friend?"

"My teacher." Shoto shifted in his seat. "I am doing... extra credit work."

Fuyumi deflated. "Oh." She cleared her throat and smiled. "That's wonderful, Shoto."

Shoto took a bite of his meal and glanced around. He knew father was not home— he was always at his Agency by now and Fuyumi said he had not returned here last night— but it never hurt to be careful.

"There's a little girl who needs some help." He considered his meal but was unable to resist casting quick glances at his sister. "She should be in elementary school, I believe. Do you have any advice?"

"Advice?" Fuyumi echoed as if she could not believe he asked. Her face lit up. "Of course! What would you like to know?"

Shoto considered the question carefully. "She is moving to a new place. I want her to feel welcome. And I do not want to… frighten her."

Fuyumi tapped her chin and nodded thoughtfully. "I see. Well, the first thing to remember is that kids are smart. They can be in their own little world but they notice things. If you're nervous she'll be able to tell."

"I am not nervous." Shoto stated.

"Of course not." Fuyumi said agreeably. "If you want her to be comfortable at her new home, you should try to be comfortable as well. Make her feel like she belongs. Tell her what's wonderful about it. Show her things you find fun." She absently poked her meal. "Are you familiar with wherever she's moving?"

Shoto carefully chewed and swallowed a bite of food before responding. "Yes."

"Then maybe share a secret trick that only you know." Fuyumi offered.

Shoto frowned at his plate. "What do you mean?"

Fuyumi thought about it as she drummed her fingers on the table. "Well, you know how if you push the window upstairs a certain way, it'll squeak like a mouse? Something like that. She'll have to learn those little tricks herself, but if you show her something only those familiar with the place might know, it may help make it feel more like home."

Shoto considered her advice seriously. He did not know UA from top to bottom, but he was sure he could think of a 'trick' to show Eri if he put his mind to it. Now that he thought about it, he knew which floorboards and doors squeaked and how to move so they didn't, which was a 'trick' which gave him some comfort at home. Was that what Fuyumi was talking about?

His phone buzzed. He checked to see it was a group text from Aizawa-sensei. They were going to show Eri around UA. If he was available, he could come.

Shoto looked to Fuyumi. "You have today off, right? Could you drive me to UA?"

She looked so happy he asked. It was… strange. Not bad, but different. "Of course I can. Let me get my keys." She hurried out the door and popped her head back in. "I have some toys as well. Do you want to bring them?"

Shoto's lips quirked upward. "Yes. Thanks, Fuyumi."

The drive to UA was much more relaxed than breakfast. Fuyumi filled the car with chatter, only needing some prodding from Shoto to tell him about her work. She still paused and blinked on occasion but her surprise at his interest soon faded. Her life as an elementary school teacher was fascinating, and enlightening. Some of the kids she taught sounded like hellions. Shoto could only hope Eri did not decide he needed an unprompted hair cut.

They were passing by a store when something in the window caught his eye.

"Can we stop here?"

Fuyumi instantly pulled over and Shoto got out, leaving his backpack in the car.

"I'll be right back." he promised.

He hurried into the store and pulled out his wallet, making a single purchase. He nervously eyed the cashier as she rang him out, but the woman did not appear to recognize him. In fact, she appeared incredibly bored as she bagged his item and handed it to him with a mumbled dismissal. Shoto clutched the bag to his chest and returned to the car, making sure his purchase was covered.

Fuyumi eyed the bag curiously. "Did you get what you wanted?"

Shoto hid the bag at the bottom of his backpack and nodded. "Yes."

He did not tell her what he bought, and she did not ask. He was not sure whether he was grateful for that.

They pulled up outside of UA and he got out with a backpack of toys, waving to Fuyumi as she drove away. He entered the school grounds and saw Aizawa loitering outside of the building. Was Shoto seeing things, or were the shadows under his eyes darker than usual?

"Todoroki." Aizawa greeted him. "You're the first to arrive."

Shoto clutched at his backpack strap and shifted his weight. "Am I too early?"

"No." Aizawa said briefly. "In fact, you're right on time. Eri is a bit… upset."

Shoto's brow creased. "Is she alright?"

"She's overwhelmed." Aizawa said flatly. He dragged a hand over his tired eyes. "Perhaps seeing another familiar face will cheer her up."

A frown played at Shoto's lips. "But isn't Hawks supposed to be here?"

He knew if anyone could brighten Eri's day, it was the Winged Hero. She always perked up whenever Shoto or Iida told her stories about their internship with him.

Something flitted across Aizawa's face. "He's currently in the nurse's office, recovering."

He moved towards the building but Shoto did not follow. He was rooted in place, his throat as dry as sand. If Hawks had been injured and was *still* in Recovery Girl's office the day after, then how badly off was he?

"What happened?" he croaked.

Aizawa eyed him critically. "Eri's abusers tried to take her back by force. Hawks assisted in fighting them off. Most have been arrested."

That was not an answer. Shoto dare not call him out on it.

"Can I see Hawks?" he blurted. He gripped the straps of his backpack. "I— er. If he's recovering, maybe Eri and I should visit so she can be sure he's okay."

Aizawa's neutral expression made him uncomfortable. "Hawks is hooked up to some machinery and she has shown aversion to doctors. I'm not sure how she'd react."

"Oh." Shoto averted his gaze, but forced it back to Aizawa's face. "But…
she *knows* something's wrong."

Aizawa's lips thinned. "Yes."

"So maybe letting her see him would be better than trying to hide it." Shoto pressed, thinking of Fuyumi's advice. "She might be imagining worse things so—"

"He's catatonic, Shoto." Aizawa said quietly.

Shoto heard the words, but they failed to mean anything, lost in the static that covered his thoughts. Somehow he found himself heading inside, and although he heard Aizawa call out to him, he did not stop. A hand landed on his shoulder and he stiffened.

"You're here to see Eri." Aizawa reminded him levelly.

"…Yes." Shoto confirmed with only a bit of reluctance.

He pushed his worry for Hawks into the back of his mind and followed Aizawa into a section of the campus he did not remember being in before, walking for about five minutes. To his surprise, there were a host of buildings in various states of being built, with some already completed. His teacher caught sight of his questioning look and sighed.

"Don't share this with your classmates but we're building dorms for students and teachers in order to turn UA into a boarding school. We're not in a rush at the moment, so they'll all be completed some time after the summer break."

"Is it because of Eri?" Shoto questioned. Keeping her on UA's campus would hopefully keep her out of the wrong hands.

"Partially." Aizawa acknowledged. "Though that is only a small part of the reason. We've been considering this change for a while, but came to the decision that it will be safer for students to be housed on the school campus in the near-future."

Shoto thought of his room back at the estate and wondered if his dorm room would look similar. Living in a dorm would certainly be a change, and part of him was glad that he had some time to adjust to the idea. He would be housed with all his classmates, from Midoriya to Yaoyorozu to Bakugo. That would certainly be… interesting.

He would miss Fuyumi's home cooking, though.

They entered what would become the teachers' building and headed to one of the apartments. Aizawa's living quarters were what Shoto expected from his teacher. The area was clean and the bed looked rather unslept in, but he could see stacks of paperwork and folders— perhaps for missions— piled up on the desk in the corner.

What many would consider out of place were the drawings scattered across the coffee table, though Shoto hoped they would be a mainstay for a long time. Eri and Present Mic were sitting at the table, both drawing intently. Shoto caught sight of Mic's current work and stifled a chuckle. An artist, Mic was not. Eri looked up as the door opened, freezing like a deer in the headlights.

Shoto was used to seeing that look on her face whenever he arrived unexpectedly so he only waved. "Hello, Eri."

"Shoto!"

Her worried expression cleared and she ran up to him, only to stop. She always did that whenever he or Iida visited. She'd run up, but halt just short of them as if she did not know

what to do next. Shoto himself had no idea what she wanted to do either, so the repetition continued. He wished he could figure it out. Maybe then that uncomfortable look on her face would fade.

Shoto took off his backpack and opened it. "I brought some things for you. My older sister gave them to me. She is a school teacher."

Eri eyed the bag hesitantly and, at his nod, started going through it, pulling items out. She came across the new bag and paused, eyeing it curiously, but did not touch it. Shoto took it out himself and faltered, glancing at Aizawa. In hindsight, he should have talked to his teacher about whether he should give this to Eri, but it was too late now.

He opened the bag and pulled out the Hawks plushie he'd bought, holding it out to Eri.

"I thought you may like this."

Eri's eyes went round. She slowly reached out and took the plushie from him, staring at it. The plushie had Hawks's trademark golden eyes and easy smile, his red wings flared out like he was in flight. It was not one that made noise like the ones with All Might's 'I am here' catchphrase, but it was soft and made from good material that would last a while. In Shoto's opinion, it was a good investment.

Eri hugged the plush and pressed a cheek against its hair. She did not start crying, which Shoto took as a good sign.

"You got this for me?" Eri mumbled.

"Yes." Shoto said simply.

Red eyes blinked at him. She took a step forward, then another, and threw her arms around him. Shoto stiffened, flailing uncertainly for a moment, and saw Present Mic miming a holding motion. He carefully hugged Eri back.

"Thank you..." She said so softly he could barely hear her.

She let go before he responded and retreated to the far side of the room, taking the plushie with her. She did not touch the other toys. In fact, she seemed to give them a wide berth. Shoto knew better than to press. If she wanted to play with one, she would have grabbed them, but for some reason she seemed hesitant. At least she held onto the Hawks plushie.

Mic leaned over and lowered his voice. "Good job, Shoto."

Shoto frowned at him, wondering if he was being sarcastic. But this was Present Mic, so probably not. The reason for his praise still escaped him, however. "What are you talking about?"

Mic shrugged with a rather irritating and superior smirk on his face, not that Shoto would ever tell him that.

Eri remained on her own. Shoto accepted he would not get much interactions with her for now. While Eri could draw things Shoto would never think of, she seemed very hesitant when it came to playing with others, like she did not know how to act. Shoto could relate.

Present Mic was not so appeased. "You know, if I thought she was shy I'd be happy to let her play on her own but seeing this just *hurts*."

"Eri's calmer, so let's leave her be." Aizawa said. His tone was not quite sharp but it had a warning edge to it.

Mic raised his hands and did not press the issue. "I need to head out anyway. I have papers to grade." Eri heard him and crept back over, mumbling a goodbye. Mic ruffled her hair. "I'll be back later."

He left. Eri immediately went to Aizawa and clung to his leg.

He knelt next to her. "Are you feeling okay?"

She shrugged.

"Did you like staying with Mic?"

She shrugged again.

"It's okay to be honest. I won't be mad."

"He's nice but I like staying with you better." She adjusted her grip on her new plushie and looked up at him pleadingly. "Can we see Hawks now please?"

A grimace flashed across Aizawa's face, almost too quickly to spot.

Before he could reply, they were distracted by a rapid knock on the door. Present Mic must have forgotten something. Shoto opened the door to reveal Hitoshi Shinso on the other side, his hand raised to knock again. He lowered his hand and the two stared at each other.

"Um." Shoto said eloquently.

"You can let him in, Todoroki." Aizawa called.

Shoto stepped aside and Shinso walked in, putting his bag on a table by the door. He did not need to ask where to put it and Aizawa did not object to its placement. Had he been here before?

"Eri, this is Hitoshi Shinso. He's been training with me to get into the Hero course. He will be around a lot."

Ah. That explained Shinso's familiarity with Aizawa's apartment.

"Hi." Eri mumbled.

It was not the most enthusiastic greeting, though Shoto suspected that was from exhaustion. One person had just left, and another new one had shown up. Shoto would not be in the mood to greet new faces either. Giving proof to his thoughts, Eri gripped the Hawks plushie like a lifeline.

"Shinso, Todoroki, you two already know each other." Aizawa continued.

"In passing." Shinso said vaguely.

There were shadows under his eyes, but the sharp alertness in them reminded Shoto of Aizawa. His messy hair, clothes, and demeanor reminded Shoto of Aizawa as well. Was he Aizawa's secret love-child or something? Shoto opened his mouth to ask but thought better of it. Midoriya had reacted rather negatively when Shoto asked about him and All Might and he'd rather not scare Eri.

The Hero and General Department students eyes each other awkwardly. Neither were the most sociable people and the lack of an icebreaker type of person soon became obvious. However, if Shinso was going to be around Eri, Shoto supposed it would be a good idea to get to know each other. How would Midoriya approach the situation? Shoto had an inkling.

"Hello, Shinso." He greeted. "We will be great friends."

Shinso stared at him and scowled. "I'm not here to—" His eyes flicked to Eri and he stopped. "...Fine."

Even Shoto could tell that Shinso had chosen not to argue for Eri's sake. If he were Midoriya, he would likely be beaming. It appeared under that apathetic exterior that Shinso had a good heart. No wonder Aizawa was training him to join the Hero Department.

"Wonderful." Aizawa sighed, though Shoto thought he might sound pleased. "You're the only other one who could make it, Shinso."

He put his hands in his pockets and shrugged. "Well, I wasn't doing anything else."

Eri's brow creased. "You came to see me?"

"Yeah." Shinso said, seemingly unaffected by her wide-eyed stare.

Shoto would never get used to seeing Eri floored by simple acts like that. She dropped her gaze to the plushie she held.

"That's a nice Hawks toy." Shinso commented. "Are you a fan?"

She nodded solemnly. "Hawks helped me and believed me."

Shinso hummed in agreement as if he understood what she meant but Shoto knew he didn't. Even *he* did not know the full story and he had been one of Hawks's interns. "Is Hawks your favorite Hero then?"

"Yeah..." She nodded, then looked worriedly at… Shoto? Why'd she look at *him* like she thought she was doing something wrong?

Feeling like he needed to respond somehow, he inclined his head. "Hawks is a good choice for a favorite Hero. He's very, uh… helpful."

Her head tipped. "Did he help you, too?"

Shoto's throat closed up. He could feel Aizawa and Shinso's eyes on him as they waited for his response. There was no way Eri knew about Endeavor. He doubted she even knew who Shoto's father *was*. So she must be talking about the Hero internships. Realizing that, Shoto relaxed.

"Yes, he helped me a lot."

Eri hesitated, inched closer, then reached out, patting his hand like adults did with her. "Hawks won't let them hurt you ever again."

Well.

So much for that.

Shoto's heart pounded in his chest and Fuyumi's words echoed in his mind. He managed to nod, making sure he avoided Aizawa's gaze. "Er. Of course. Hawks is a great Hero but my favorite Hero is All Might. Do you know who that is?"

She shook her head. Shoto was tempted to tell her about the Symbol of Peace but feared showing her videos of his heroic deeds would not go over well. From what he could surmise, Eri was raised in a violent environment. She did not need to see footage of people in disasters. True, she would also see them being rescued but it would probably be disturbing to her.

He'd tell her about All Might later. Or maybe he could convince Midoriya to come over and tell her about his favorite Hero himself. After all, he was the expert when it came to all things All Might.

"Since Shinso is here, what would you like to do next?" Shoto asked instead.

"I…" She looked uncertainly at Aizawa and ducked her head, gripping the plushie tightly. "Can we visit Hawks?"

Aizawa sighed and knelt in front of her so his eyes were level with hers. "I told you Hawks is at the nurse's office."

A horrified look flashed across her face. She mumbled something and shuffled to the far corner on the table, away from Aizawa, with the Hawks plushie clutched to her chest.

"Wait. What happened to Hawks?" Shinso asked, confused.

"He was injured while escorting Eri here." Shoto murmured. "He's catatonic."

Shinso's sleepy-looking eyes widened. "Oh."

"What does 'cat-onic' mean?" Eri asked. She looked from Shoto to Shinso and back again.

Crap, she'd overheard him. Words failed Shoto.

"It means that he's awake, but he's not responding to anything." Shinso explained briefly.

"That includes responding to you if you go visit." Aizawa added. Though his words were blunt, his tone was softer than Shoto was used to hearing. "Seeing him like that might be… upsetting for you."

"I won't be upset." Eri pleaded. "I won't let my curs— Quirk do bad things. I promise."

"That's not what I'm worried about, kiddo." Aizawa sighed. "I don't think a visit is a good idea for you."

His obvious worry about how she'd react to seeing Hawks went right over her head. Shoto saw her grit her teeth, tears gathering in the corner of her eyes, and she let her white hair fall into her face again. Her shoulders were shaking. Was she finally going to cry? The answer proved to be 'no' as she clenched her tiny jaw, though she continued to shake. It took a second, but Shoto came to realize it was not sadness that made her shiver, but *fear*.

"What else is wrong, Eri?" he asked.

Eri mumbled something and glanced nervously at Aizawa.

"You can tell me. I won't be mad." Shoto assured her.

She slowly inched closer to him and stood on her tiptoes. He obediently leaned over so she could whisper in his ear.

"I know they're lying. Hawks isn't okay." Her eyes filled with tears but they didn't fall. "They're using up all his blood, like *he* did with me, aren't they?"

Shinso must have overheard her because he made a soft gagging sound that he failed to muffle. Shoto's only reaction was the slight widening of his eyes. Is *that* what Eri's father had done to her? Drained her of blood? He felt sick to his stomach.

Eri clutched at his shirt and stared up at him with fearful eyes but a quivering jaw, as if she were trying to appear strong. "Can you tell them they can take all my blood instead?"

For the second time, Shoto could not find his voice.

Aizawa looked pained. "They're not hurting Hawks or taking all his blood. That's not what a doctor is for, Eri. A doctor heals and helps."

Eri did not argue with him. She merely lowered her head so her hair fell back into her face.

"She doesn't believe you." Shoto said softly.

"I'm aware." Aizawa, short and curt. He sighed and raised his voice. "Fine, we can visit Hawks."

Eri immediately ran to him and he picked her up. Her plushie was still clutched safely in her arms.

Shoto and Shinso followed Aizawa down the familiar path to Recovery Girl's office. Despite himself, Shoto's steps quickened and he brushed past his teacher, hurrying inside without knocking. A flurry of movement sent him reeling back and a foot halted mere inches from his nose. He and Miruko stared at each other and she settled onto both feet with a huff.

"*Geez*, give me a warning next time! I almost knocked your block off, kid!"

"What block?" Shoto asked, bewildered.

"Figure of speech, kid." Miruko shook her head and pulled him into the room. She paused, poked her head back outside, and sighed. "Also, *you're* hopeless right now."

"Sorry." a timid voice mumbled tiredly.

Miruko rolled her eyes and yanked a white-cloaked Hero into the room. Shoto had not even realized he was there. Was his Quirk to blend into the wall or something? Aizawa, Shinso, and Eri followed, and the teacher's lips dipped into a frown.

"Sit down before you collapse, Amajiki. Why hasn't Fatgum relieved you yet?"

The white-cloaked Hero's hood fell back, revealing black hair and a pale, uncomfortable face. He looked so nervous Shoto swore he would bolt for the door if one of them sneezed unexpectedly.

"He went to bed. I think his sidekick forgot to switch places with me."

"Hmph." Aizawa grunted.

Amajiki's shoulders slumped. "Maybe he did it on purpose. Maybe he's implying I'm not working hard enough." He shuddered and pulled his hood back over his head.

"You've worked more than you should." Aizawa growled. "Now *sit*, Amajiki."

Amajiki obediently sat in an empty chair. Shoto noticed the curtains were shut around one of the beds and his stomach twisted into knots. He glanced questioningly at Amajiki, who awkwardly glanced back and forth between him and Shinso.

"*Hopeless*." Miruko muttered. "Amajiki, meet Shoto Todoroki of Class 1-A, Hero course, and Hitoshi Shinso of Class 1-C, General Department. Todoroki, Shinso, meet Tamaki Amajiki of UA's Big Three. Hero Name: Suneater. He's in the Hero course's Class 3-A." She glared at Aizawa. "Was that so hard?"

"Hmm."

"*Hmm*." Miruko huffed back, mimicking Aizawa's low grunt.

She looked questioningly at Eri, who was still in Aizawa's arms, and adopted a softer expression. Despite her insistence on seeing Hawks, the sight of the nurse's office seemed to have overwhelmed her, leading to her hiding her face in her guardian's scarf. Miruko did not try to force her out of her comfort zone, and Shoto felt his respect for the Rabbit Hero go up a few more pegs. Instead she looked to Aizawa.

"You good to go?" Her gaze flicked back to Eri.

"Yes."

Miruko nodded and peered between the curtains, but not before Shoto glimpsed the pained look on her face. "Hawks, you have visitors."

There was a pause and Shoto heard her take a shuddering breath. Then she pulled the curtain back.

For a second, Shoto thought nothing was wrong and everyone had been overreacting. Hawks looked perfectly calm as he sat on the bed, his wings pulled close to his body with the tips dipping down past the mattress. But that thought only lasted a second because he was too still. Too quiet.

Hawks was always moving and often talking, but now he did none of that. As the seconds passed, Shoto slowly realized that the Hawks in front of him was more like a statue than a person. Only the serene beeping of the monitor attached to his arm showed he wasn't made of stone.

Eri might have made a distressed sound. She must have, because Aizawa was shushing her softly. Shoto was too distracted to really notice. He slowly approached the bed and looked at his mentor's face.

His eyes were glassy and his pupils were grey, almost making him appear blind. Shoto could not bear to look at them, so he looked at Hawks's nose instead, like one of the books he read said to in order to give the illusion that he was meeting their eyes.

"Hawks-sensei?"

Hawks had no reaction. He did not even blink. He continued staring vacantly straight ahead, his hands placed limply in his lap. Shoto resisted the urge to grasp his shoulders and beg him to respond. He had been so worried about how Eri might react he did not consider his own reaction.

Shoto had not cried in a long time, but seeing Hawks like this made his throat tighten and his eyes burn. He rubbed his left one just to be sure it was not literally burning but forced his gaze back to Hawks, searching for any type of reaction.

"Hawks-sensei?" he called again, and pretended his voice did not tremble.

"I don't think he can hear us." Shinso said lowly.

A shudder passed through Hawks's body and he blinked with his human eyelids. Gold eyes slowly moved to the purple-haired student. Shinso startled and Shoto's breath caught.

"He won't answer." Miruko said flatly. "He hasn't spoken a word since his last seizure."

Anger simmered in Shoto's stomach, slow and hot. Why were they still acting like Hawks was unaware? "He *can* hear us. He's looking at Shinso."

The adults looked at him, then at Hawks, who still stared at Shinso. Miruko hurried to his side and touched his arm. He slowly looked down at her hand.

"Hawks?" Her voice shook. "Can you hear me, Baby Bird?"

Hawks blinked at her hand. His fingers twitched and his lips moved soundlessly.

Miruko's smile was fragile. "Hey, Hawks. You're going to give me a heart attack one of these days, ya know?"

Hawks blinked lethargically and Shoto could see him struggling to keep his eyes focused on her face.

"Recovery Girl fixed you up." Miruko continued, speaking at a normal pace but making sure each word was fully enunciated. "That's why you feel so tired."

Hawks continued to look at her vacantly. His lips moved but no sound came out. His brow wrinkled and his mouthed soundlessly again.

"Dammit." Aizawa hissed. "I'm getting Mic. He can read lips."

He shoved Eri at a bewildered Amajiki and hurried out the door, pulling out his phone as he went.

Hawks slowly turned and watched the door click shut. A slight frown twisted his features and his left arm unexpectedly jerked, smacking into the chair next to his bed. He flinched and pulled his arm to his chest, staring at the offending chair in bewilderment. The bewilderment vanished as his skin drained of color and he clutched at his left bicep, chest heaving.

"Hawks, what's wrong?" Miruko asked urgently. "Are you in pain?"

Hawks's gaze slowly returned to her, as if it took physical effort for him to move his eyes. Just as slowly, he shook his head. He rubbed his left arm again, accidentally hitting the IV in his arm. He considered it for a few moments, then abruptly yanked it out. The other wires attached to him soon followed and the machines around them shrieked. Eri screamed as well and clung to Amajiki, who jumped out of his chair, knocking it over.

This startled Hawks, who lurched out of bed and grasped the heart monitor for balance. Shoto saw it spark and it abruptly turned off, spewing a pathetic puff of smoke. A feather ended its misery and Hawks backed away from the wreck, expression wild. He looked at them, but there was no recognition in his gaze.

"Kids, back off." Miruko ordered calmly. She slowly raised her hands to chest level, keeping her palms exposed as she reached out towards Hawks. "Hawks, it's Rumi. Can you hear me?"

Gold eyes did not move to her face. They continued to flick around the room as his chest heaved. His wings twitched but no feathers detached from them. Shoto swore he saw the feathers *shift* slightly, however. They almost appeared… sharp? He stared at them intently, trying to figure out if he had imagined it. Before he could, the door opened.

"Hello, listeners! I am here~!"

Shoto felt a yank on his arm and his vision blurred. His back slammed into something hard as his shoulder knocked into something softer and he heard someone yelp. The world stopped blurring and he looked up. His head nearly collided with Amajiki's as he was awkwardly shoved into the corner with Eri sandwiched between them. Shoto himself was trapped between Eri, Shinso, the wall… and Hawks?

Hawks's back was to the students and Eri as he kept them trapped in the corner, his spread wings blocking Shoto's view of the nurse's office. Over the wing, Shoto caught a glimpse of Present Mic's pointed hair.

Next to Shoto, Eri did not look scared at all. In fact she seemed rather calm, as if something she'd expected for a long time had finally been confirmed.

Hawks did not look back at them. He kept his wings flared up, and Shoto realized he was shielding them with them. He watched them quiver and wondered if Aizawa was using his Quirk on Hawks.

"Good going, Mic." Aizawa hissed, barely loud enough to hear him.

"*Holy*— Are you four alright?" Mic called urgently.

"We're not hurt." Shinso called back, though he sounded nervous.

Hawks flinched visibly and his head jerked to the side, revealing his face to the students and Eri. Although he moved and reacted, there was no awareness in his dull, grey-tinged eyes, as if he were still lost in another world. He blinked lethargically and his gaze slid past Amajiki, Eri, and Shoto before focusing on Shinso with an unnerving intensity.

"P'rple?" he mumbled.

Shinso blinked. "Er, yes? My hair is purple."

The delirium in Hawks's eyes did not fade, but a sharpness entered his gaze that put Shoto on edge. He turned back towards the teachers and Miruko.

"W'n't let 'em 'urt you." Hawks slurred.

A shudder passed through his body and his shoulders tensed. Shoto realized he was likely preparing to attack, Quirk or no Quirk.

Shinso realized the same. "No one is going to hurt us. You're safe. We're all safe. We're at UA, remember?"

Hawks's head snapped back to them so quickly Shoto was shocked he did not get whiplash. The mindless panic drained from his eyes and finally, the warm golden color fully returned. He blinked and stepped forward, releasing Shoto, Shinso, Eri, and Amajiki, and looked back at them. He continued to stare at them, but did not speak.

Then Hawks sat on the floor with his knees pulled to his chest and pulled his wings around himself, shielding him from sight.

Eri scrambled over to him and his wings parted enough for her to clamber into his arms before closing again. Shoto blinked and swore the feathers looked *sharper* again. He knew Hawks could use his feathers as swords, but he never saw him sharpen them while they were attached to his back before. Everyone watched, waiting for Hawks to do something else, but as a few minutes passed he never did.

Mic spoke first. "What the h—"

Recovery Girl— when had she gotten there?— whacked him in the shin with her cane. "Language, young man. You should know better."

Mic chuckled awkwardly and scratched the back of his head. "Sorry about that, listeners. What I meant to say was—" His voice rose in volume. "—*What was that?!*"

"I think that thing you said is a trigger phrase." Miruko said. Her tone was quiet but icy, and Shoto saw her hand clench into a fist. "He freaked out when All Might said it, too."

Hawks did not emerge from his wings to support or deny her claim.

"Oh. I guess loudly announcing myself was a bad idea." Mic mumbled weakly, chastised.

Aizawa made a sound that could be either an exasperated scoff or a muffled snarl of rage.

Shoto thought he heard Eri whispering but felt it was impolite to try to eavesdrop, so he tried not to listen too closely. As Shoto watched, the individual feathers of Hawks's wings seemed to ripple, and he watched the sharp edges leave them.

Miruko carefully approached and crouched in front of him. "Hawks?"

His wings parted just enough for Shoto to get a glimpse an ashen face and a single, exhausted golden eye.

Miruko smiled weakly. "Welcome back."

Hawks hid inside his wings again and did not come out no matter how much Miruko tried to coax him.

"Well." Mic said faintly. "That was something."

Shoto could only nod in solemn agreement.

XXXXXXX

Twice huddled in the corner of Kurogiri's bar and tried not to sulk.

It had only been a few days but his attempts to meet with Hawks and talk had gone absolutely nowhere. The Birdie was too damn busy for him to catch alone without seeming like a stalker, and it seemed he was on a mission somewhere since Twice did not find him on his usual patrol route. That was not normal, but not so out of place that his more paranoid thoughts took over.

He'd give Hawks a couple days before he started his own search party.

Only adding to his gloom, Shigaraki had taken the computer and Toga was nowhere to be seen, leaving him with grumpy old Dabi for company. Yes, Dabi was younger than him but that was not the point. Dabi was the greatest guy, not thinking he was weird or making faces when he contradicted himself, but he was not much of a talker. Or a team meeting kind of guy. Honestly, Twice had no idea why he was here.

"So why are you here?" Twice asked.

"Don't tell me! I don't care." Twice snapped.

Dabi shot him a lazy look from where he slouched against the bar. "The boss wants to see me."

"He's playing video games. He's really good. I'd love to watch."

"Don't disturb him. He gets so mad when he sucks at them. It was scary."

Dabi huffed, lip curling, though Twice sensed it was at Shigaraki, not him. "Not Shigaraki. I'm here to meet his… 'sensei'." His blue eyes narrowed to slits but he said nothing further.

"That guy's creepy. If you don't come out, we'll rescue you."

"If you don't come out you're on your own."

"Heh." Dabi chuckled. "Thanks for the support, Twice."

Twice smiled, though Dabi probably couldn't see it with the mask. "No problem. That's what friends are for."

"We're not friends, you loner jerk!" Twice grumbled.

Dabi did not reply. Twice wondered if he considered them friends or not. Probably not. He tried not to think about it. Twice slouched in a sulk and lazily eyed the bar around them, briefly looking at Kurogiri. The bartender did not glance his way, busy cleaning a glass. Why did he need to clean them so much? It was not like he had customers piling in.

"You've been hanging out here a lot." Dabi noted. "Is that what you're doing? Trying to… make friends?"

The way he said friends was odd. Twice could not tell if the disgusted tone meant he thought friendship was a weakness or he loathed himself for considering it anything else. Dabi was such a strange enigma wrapped in a mystery tied with some secrecy-ribbon. If he was unwrapped there was probably a billion more layers of mystery in there.

"Himiko is amazing." Twice fawned. "She's so outspoken and brave! We're already friends without stabbing involved."

"I haven't been here just to make friends." Twice denied. "I've been doing some investigating and I think the Heroes are shit."

Dabi gave him a look. "Obviously."

"Not all of them are shit." Twice amended hastily. "Well, one of them is not-shit. Jury's still out for the others."

"Jury says screw those other assholes!" Twice growled. "They're hypocrites! Letting one of their own get abused cause they don't care to look."

"They're looking all right." Twice muttered, as angry as himself. "They just don't want to help because he's not right in the head like us."

Dabi's bored expression had vanished, replaced by something colder. "…*What*." he said flatly.

Twice's— slightly exaggerated— annoyance shifted into something more serious. "Oh right. You joined us because of Stain and his ideal of taking down the corrupt Heroes. Well you know that one Hero Stain approved of? Hawks? I think he is being abused by somebody. It's probably another Hero because the other Heroes aren't doing shit about it even though it's obvious. Or they know he's mentally ill and has other personalities in his head so they're ignoring it. Did I tell you I ran into him when he was having a panic attack in an alley? He had a bunch of bruises and cuts and looked at me like he was scared I'd hit him. Think I spotted some old bruises around his neck, too. Or maybe they were burns?" He flexed his fingers in a squeezing motion. "Like handprints…"

Twice trailed off as he caught sight of Dabi's face. His jaw was clenched and quivering with so much tension it was a surprise his teeth did not crack. Twice could see the tendons jumping in his throat and his eyes burned as blue as his fire.

"Are you okay?" Twice asked hesitantly.

Dabi's expression smoothed over but the cold— almost *crazed*— anger remained in his gaze. If Twice looked too long at his eyes, he wondered if he'd burst into flames.

"I'm *fine*." Dabi abruptly rose from his chair. "Time to meet All For One, I guess."

He stormed out. Twice would like to claim Dabi wasn't upset, but he left burn marks where he stepped.

Kurogiri observed the damage and gave a tired sigh. "Wonderful."

"Sorry, man." Twice apologized.

"Hey, it's not my fault!" Twice defended.

Kurogiri's white eyes shifted as if he were looking skyward for patience, but he walked around the counter and began inspecting the damage without another word. Twice watched him for a moment before looking shiftily at the door Dabi had exited.

"What's burning him up inside?" he muttered to himself.

No one answered.

XXXXXXX

All For One could not stop an amused smile from stretching his cracked lips as he observed Twice and Dabi's interactions. Jin Bubaigawara was such an interesting point of entertainment, unintentionally uncovering conspiracies and diving deep into the corruption of Hero Society without even meaning to.

That man was too good at heart to be the kind of ruthless Villain All For One approved of, but was he ever talented at causing chaos. His Quirk was so fascinating as well. All For One might just have to take it someday. He put that possibility on the backburner as his guest finally arrived, approaching from behind with his hands in his pockets.

"You wanted to see me?"

Dabi tried to keep his voice level, unaffected, and bored, but All For One could hear the anger lurking there. He was already on edge, and All For One could not help but want to see what happened when he was given a final push.

"Touya Todoroki."

He sensed Dabi's body go rigid, and felt his internal temperature spike as he prepared to summon his flames. All For One smelt the slightest hint of burning flesh and made a note to remember that weakness. Either to exploit it or— should Dabi prove loyal— free him from it with a Quirk. But that would not happen if the child foolishly attempted to attack him now. Time to calm the toddler from its tantrum.

"That is your name, is it not?" All For One asked pleasantly.

"My name is *Dabi*." the burned child spat. How *predictable* he acted, like a hurt animal snarling at the world.

"Of course." All For One agreed. "But you *were* Touya Todoroki."

He felt the heat building in Dabi's body vanish. "What do you want?"

If All For One had eyebrows, he would raise one incredulously. "What's that? You don't want to know how I discovered your identity?"

"I *don't care*." Dabi spat. So defensive. So impatient. "What do you *want*? Why did you call me here?"

All For One allowed himself to smile pleasantly even though he knew the benign affect was ruined due to his scarred face. "I just wanted to reassure you that you do not need to keep secrets from me. I know your name. And I know your goals. They align with mine much better than I previously believed."

"Oh really?" Dabi snarled sarcastically.

"Really." All For One said, still bemused. His smile vanished. "We both want Hero Society to crumble. For the injustices they chose to bury in favor of their glorious Heroes, of course." He cocked his head. "You approached the Hero Commission about Endeavor and they dismissed you, did they not?"

Dabi's jaw clenched. He bared his teeth like a tiger but was nothing more than an abused kitten, hissing and clawing at anyone who came near. There was so much anger there. So much unbridled rage.

But it was hindered. It was tethered and restrained, when it should be as violent and consuming as the flames his Quirk gifted him.

"I am not surprised." All For One murmured with carefully-crafted sympathy. Time for one more splinter under the fingernails. He purposely turned away from Dabi. "Oh, and about the Commission… I'd thought you would like to know that Twice is correct about Hawks, though the reasons for his injuries were slightly different this time. It seems the Number Three Hero discovered what Endeavor did and tried to expose him." He heard Dabi's breathing hitch and struggled to hold back a grin. "They tortured their precious Hawks to shut him up, it seems. Would you like to see the footage of what they did? It's *truly* terri—"

"*NO!*" Dabi choked like a drowning man gasped for air. He remembered himself and put on an aura of feigned indifference. "I don't care about any Heroes. I just want them to burn."

All For One smiled thinly. "There is more than one way to destroy a Hero than burning them to ashes, Dabi. If you ever wish to learn how to truly break them, come to me. I'm sure we will have much to talk about."

"*Screw you*." Dabi snarled, flames flickering in his fists.

He stormed out and did not appear to notice his hands were burning, the smell of burnt flesh wafting through the air. What a self-destructive child. More importantly, what a waste of villainous talent and ambition. All For One would change that. He had trained Shigaraki to become his successor, but there was no harm in a couple side projects every now and then.

Tenko Shimura would break All Might.

Touya Todoroki would break Endeavor.

And as for who would break Hero Society itself?

All For One watched his incriminating file on the Commission's inhumane Icarus Project grow larger and larger by the second and laughed.

Demanding Answers (Cause That Always Ends Well)

Keep it together. Keep it together. Keep it together.

Keep it together. Keep it together. Keep it together.

*Keep it together. Keep it together. **KEEP IT TOGETHER***

*We can do this we can't do this so cold **can't breathe** we're losing ourselves so tired it's dark again keep calm **pain** can't trying **no** stay calm **pain** can't trying **failing PAIN** no **no NO NO NO***—

A shudder passed through Hawks, shaking him from head to foot to wing tip. He tried to focus on holding Eri, who sat quietly in his arms as her own gripped a Hawks plushie. If he were able to, he might find it funny that they clung to her as desperately as she clung to a plushie of Hawks. They? Him. *Him*, for he was Hawks not them not—

*Cold tired can't tired pain hurts focus can't trying scared **PAIN***—

Hawks huddled with Eri in the safety of his enveloped wings. They— *He* knew there were other people out there— wherever they-he was— but he couldn't deal with them right now. He could not even handle 'dealing' with them—himself. He-they resisted the urge to rock back and forth and focused on holding Eri.

Eri safe Eri okay she was dead now not-dead? How?

Were those his thoughts or ours— theirs? Theirs as in the voices, who were *separate* from him, *dammit*. The voices were trying, *he* was trying, but their head was a *mess* to put it lightly. In a reprieve of rambling lucidity, Yellow described it as if an earthquake had gone through their 'home', leaving exposed and sparking electrical wiring everywhere. Too often, everything would black out like a glitching video game world, forcing them back 'outside' to invade Hawks's conscious mind with their literally invasive thoughts.

Hawks had no idea what happened. The last thing he remembered clearly was… making coffee? Maybe? The next thing he knew, he was here, wherever here was. And Purple was there. Past Purple. Mini-Purple. His voice was not as deep but Hawks recognized it. How did Purple get back into his old body? Wait, that wasn't right.

*Not back still here still trying **QUIET**! "*

Hawks must have loss consciousness because when he blinked, they—*he* was in a bed. He caught a glimpse of machinery and white walls and his chest went tight. His hands were free of restraints so he tried to rise but someone shoved him down. They— ***He*** lashed out, catching the Doctor— no, the man was too tall to be Ujiko— in the stomach. If that piece of shit 'doctor' thought he was going down without a fight he was in for a fucking surprise. The

League may have succeeded in capturing him again but he wasn't going to lay down and let them turn him into another pawn.

A hand grasped Hawks's wrist and he saw red. Not red, like blood, but Aizawa-sensei's red eyes. He was alive? He tried to ask how he was alive and still had his eyes but no sound came out. Behind him, Present Mic was bent over and wheezing. Wait, how was he alive too? He'd been turned into a Nomu. Jiro had to kill him.

…Where was Eri?!

He looked frantically for her, trying and failing to pull free of Aizawa's grasp. He finally spotted her in Suneater's arms— Another not-dead person? How? Oh right, they were in the past.— and relaxed. Aizawa was talking. Hawks squinted at him and tried to hear the outside words through the maddening well of melding inside words and emotions in his head.

Cold cold dark ***pain*** *sorry what happened confused can't think too much where need you*
Purple focus focus focus focus ***focus! Shinso help me***—

"***All of you, SHUT UP!"***

The silence was like a breath of fresh air after nearly drowning in the sea. Just like with drowning, although the air was fresh, it still *hurt*. The change was so sudden Hawks nearly blacked out but he stubbornly clung onto consciousness.

He could feel Purple lingering in the back of his thoughts as he struggled to keep himself under control. Purple, who was Hitoshi Shinso. He'd found another voice. That left Orange and Red. Hawks was not in the mood to rub the voices' continued trend of being completely obvious in their faces.

Hawks's wings felt strange and he pulled weakly against Aizawa's hold. Without the voices overwhelming him, the pieces were coming back and he already knew what was coming.

Hawks stopped struggling and went still. He forced his panic down and began going through his possible responses. Tsukauchi was not here so he might be able to get away with pretending he could answer the questions they would force him to. If his lessons taught him anything, he *had* to pretend because otherwise they would not stop until he was saying exactly what they wanted to hear, whether it was the truth or not.

"*They won't torture you."* Purple said. *"If they planned to, you would not have woken here, in UA."*

His pragmatic, logical answer cut through Hawks's unease and the suffocating feeling in his chest loosened. The grey tinges at the edges of his vision retreated and he forced himself to *breathe*. The teachers were still there, as was Suneater, Eri, and Miruko. His friend's presence drained away more of his fear.

He realized he was in Recovery Girl's office at UA. Ironically, the voices seemed perfectly calm about being in the school they saw destroyed. He got a vague flash of dorms and the feeling of safety that came with it and his brow furrowed. He expected more destruction.

"Have you calmed down?" Aizawa asked levelly.

Hawks repressed a flinch. He nervously eyed Aizawa's hand but did not try to break free of his grasp. He could, *easily* at that, but although Miruko was there, he knew he was in hot water up to his neck. He and the voices had *merged* somehow and done *something* with their Quirks. There was no way the other Heroes had failed to notice.

Green was back in contact, and the paper-thin walls the other voices were trying to build were already falling apart. Only Purple's Quirk kept him from being overwhelmed again. Hawks tried not to shrink away from Green's presence as it grew in his mind, pressing against his consciousness like a foot pressing down on his skull.

He could do this. He could handle three minds, himself included.

He could see fully now. Aizawa, Present Mic, Recovery Girl, Miruko, Suneater, Eri, Fatgum, and Snipe were all there. The Pros were watching him carefully, and Hawks saw Snipe had his hand on his gun. He hoped his wings weren't quivering.

What are they going to do to me?

"Nothing—"

"They'll want your cooperation." Purple interrupted Green. *"They'll expect answers."*

*I don't **have** answers. Not unless you want to tell the truth.*

"They'll lock us away." Purple said lowly.

In prison or a mental institution?

"*Either is a possibility, if we're lucky."* Purple said bluntly, not bothering to coddle him with lies.

And that's if the Commission doesn't kill us first.

"*The Commission can go screw themselves."*

Orange was back. He was angry. His anger was hot-hot-*hot* and Hawks swore he smelled nitroglycerin.

But it was okay. It was *okay*. He could handle four minds, including his own.

Eri was gone. So was Suneater. And Present Mic. And Miruko. Where were they?

Hawks tried to go to the door to look for them but Aizawa was still grasping his wrist. And his capture weapon was around him, pinning his wings to his back. When did that happen? Hawks's breathing quickened again but he forced himself not to try to break free because fighting back would just make it worse for himself.

"Shota Aizawa, stop *manhandling* my patient!" Recovery Girl snapped.

A flick of Aizawa's wrist released Hawks. He sat heavily on the bed and pretended his knees had not given out. He felt a familiar tingle in his wings and dared to glance up.

Yep, Aizawa had his Quirk active again.

"*Eraserhead sees us as a threat to his students."* Purple stated with deceptive calm. *"He won't let this go. Not unless we give him something."*

"*Why not give him the truth?"* Green said quietly.

"*We just said they'd—"*

"***Only** Aizawa."* Green interrupted. He gave a frustrated sigh. *"We're barely functioning again and we **need help**. Aizawa knows us well enough that we should be able to convince him of the truth. Plus, he's not as… illogical when it comes to All For One compared to All Might. It may be our best chance to get out of this without having to go on the run."*

"*You want to try to convince Mister 'Logical Ruse' we're his students from the future?"* Purple asked flatly.

"*It's that or have him **stalk us** and assume the worst."* Orange snapped. *"And you **know** he will."*

"*...Point taken."*

Green gave a nervous chuckle. *"At least he can't threaten to expel us again?"*

"*Oh no."* Purple said tonelessly. *"How terrible that would be compared to imprisoning us."*

Green winced. *"Just trying to lighten—"*

"Hawks?"

Hawks dropped his gaze and refused to look at Recovery Girl. She stepped into his line of sight and patted his knee.

"I know you're rather overwhelmed but can you focus for me?"

"Tryin'." Hawks mumbled. It was difficult to speak. Again. How *wonderful.*

"After the confrontation with the yakuza, you had multiple seizures and were catatonic." Recovery Girl said bluntly. Hawks had to wonder if she had told him this before, only for him to forget. He hoped that was not the case. "I believe you may have a neurological disorder. I'm taking you to get an MRI tomorrow."

Hawks bit his lip. "Day?" he forced out.

Thankfully, Recovery Girl realized what he was asking. "Today is Saturday. Your appointment is tomorrow, on Sunday."

Eri's transfer had been on Friday. He'd been drifting for nearly a day? Hawks ignored that the nurse had called it catatonia, because that was *not* what happened. The voices did *not* leave him catatonic, just unaware. Though he had never done whatever he had done during the fight with Overhaul before…

He forced himself not to think about it and looked at Aizawa instead. Aizawa, with his slight scowl, red eyes, and tense expression.

"'zawa… talk?"

"Hmm?" Recovery Girl asked.

Hawks forced his lips to move right. He did not completely succeed. "Aizawa… wanna talk… to me. Report now?"

Her wrinkled lips pressed into a thin line. "Aizawa can *wait*." She shot the dark-clothed Hero a glare before looking back to Hawks. "You need to rest."

"No." Hawks insisted stubbornly. "Not usel'ss. Don't need rest. Gotta w'rk. Report."

He tried to rise only for Aizawa to push him down again. His instincts split between going limp and fighting back and pain lanced through his head. As a result, he ended up doing neither of those things and instead curled up on the bed, gripping at his head. He remembered he had observers and forced himself to uncurl.

"'m okay."

This time, Fatgum stopped him from rising. "You are not."

Hawks tried to voice his disagreement but only managed a vague mumble. Honestly, Fatgum's arms were much more comfortable than the bed. Hawks relaxed against him, remembered himself, and shrank away before the other Hero could hit him for being clingy.

"Sorry. Not seekin' comfort. Promise. Um. I can be good Hero. Yer…" The word he wanted to use evaded him and he poked Fatgum in the side. "…squishy." He realized poking the other Hero was rude and stopped. "Sorry." He vaguely remembered Miruko and her drunken escapades and looked around for her. When had she left? "Rumi?"

"She's with Eri." Fatgum told him.

Hawks remembered blood. "Som'ne died."

"Yes." Aizawa did not avert his gaze but his jaw quivered. With anger or sorrow? "Mr. Brave was killed."

Hawks lowered his head, staring blankly at the floor. Mr. Brave. He'd been part of the raid on the Shie Hassaikai base to save Eri. He'd lived until after the Paranormal Liberation Front had ransacked UA in the last timeline. Which meant a Hero had *died* because of the changes they made.

Unable to deal with that revelation, Hawks closed his eyes and tried desperately to focus on the now. The details of who attacked slowly came back.

Hawks stiffened. "Ov'rhaul?"

"Kai Chisaki is on his way to Tartarus." Aizawa stated.

The words did not make sense—Overhaul hadn't been arrested in the timeline yet, right?—but Hawks nodded slowly to pretend he understood. He instantly regretted it, and held his head. "'Kay. M'ruko will keep 'ri safe."

"Like you did." Aizawa said neutrally.

"*Like I said, he won't let it go. I told you so."*

"*Hush, Purple."* Green hissed.

"You are not questioning him now." Recovery Girl snapped. "He can barely speak."

"But he's aware enough to know what happened." Aizawa stated. "His report is already late."

Hawks's stomach dropped. He forced his wings not to close protectively around himself.

"*You're fine."* Green rushed to assure him. *"Well, not **fine** fine. Aizawa's…*" Misery swirled through their overlapping minds. *"...suspicious."*

*How is that **fine**? That is the opposite of fine.*

"*At least it's not the Commission?"* Pink thought optimistically. When had she come back?!

Hawks forced himself to keep breathing. In and out and in and out and in and out. Everything was *fine*. He was still in control and himself. He could do this.

"I can… a-answer questions a-a-and give m-my report." he stammered. At least his speech had not slurred that badly. Oh, who was he kidding? He sounded *pathetic* and *incompetent*.

"See? He's insisting. We might as well figure out what happened." Aizawa said in that same neutral tone. "Besides, he's not in trouble. I just need him to be honest with me."

If those words came from a Commission agent's mouth, Hawks would already be bracing himself. But this was Aizawa, and the voices trusted him. Maybe Hawks could as well? Or he could at least *pretend* things would be okay until his selfish delusions crumbled around him.

Hesitantly, Hawks nodded. To his relief, Aizawa relaxed slightly. Maybe he saw Hawks's willingness as a good sign he had nothing to hide?

Recovery Girl's lips were pressed thin as she shot Aizawa a warning look. "Don't press him."

Aizawa did not respond. Recovery Girl exited the room with everyone except Eraserhead, leaving him and Hawks alone. Aizawa seemed perfectly at ease despite being alone with a

'dangerous' individual. Of course, he had Erasure, and Hawks knew Fatgum was lingering outside. After all, his Fat Absorption was a pretty good counter to Hawks's known Quirk.

Aizawa remained standing and crossed his arms over his chest, glaring down at Hawks with red eyes.

"Let's talk."

XXXXXXX

Aizawa had the feeling he would feel Recovery Girl's gaze burning into his skull for the next decade yet he did not regret his decision to separate doctor and patient one iota. Not with Hawks so volatile. He flitted between alarmed movements and hollow stillness without warning, either sitting in place and staring at nothing or flinching like a startled, half-blind bird.

Hawks had not used… whatever that glow was again, though Aizawa had to stop his feathers from sharpening a few times. Hawks did not appear to even notice what he'd been doing. That gave Aizawa no comfort, because an out of control Quirk could be just as dangerous as one the user wielded knowingly.

Aizawa had little sympathy for him. Now that Hawks was aware once more, his compassion had shelved itself, leaving the Underground Hero Eraserhead to carefully monitor the possible threat in front of him. A threat that was *in his school*, with his friends and Eri nearby.

Aizawa took another moment to study Hawks, watching him shift in place, and noted his gown had slipped from his shoulder. Goose-flesh popped up along Hawks's exposed skin but he made no move to re-position it despite his shivering. Annoyed, Aizawa grasped it to pull it back up. Hawks flinched and smacked his hand away, gripping his wrist in a standard defensive maneuver.

"Don't—"

Hawks went quiet so quickly Aizawa wondered if he bit his tongue. His hand slipped from Aizawa's wrist and he stared off to the side, away from him.

"Don't what?" Aizawa demanded.

Hawks kept his gaze averted. "Nothin'."

"I thought we were going to be honest with each other."

The words came out harsher than Aizawa intended and Hawks shrank away from him. It was barely noticeable, but Aizawa made sure to notice such things on principle, so he saw it.

"Sorry. Yer wearin' black." Hawks mumbled, gaze still averted. "Amplif'er wears black."

The name was familiar but Aizawa could not place it. Nor did he have the patience too at the moment. His phone beeped. He checked it to see it was a text from Mic. Eri was asking if

Hawks was okay yet. He sent a reply that no, Hawks was not ready for visitors and that was *final*, and shoved his phone back into his pocket.

"Hawks, do you know what happened during the fight with the yakuza?" he demanded.

"Fragm'nts."

Aizawa's eyes narrowed. "So would you like to explain what happened with your Quirk?"

A shudder passed through Hawks but he met his accusing gaze steadily. "Don't kn'w wha' happened."

His voice was toneless— eerily so— but it was his hollow expression that caught Aizawa's attention. He looked resigned, as if he knew he would not be believed no matter what he said. Aizawa didn't exactly *care*.

"You were glowing." he said flatly. "Glowing *gold*, to be precise. Oh, and I found *this* attached to your wing."

He reached into his pocket and yanked out the small device he had found, which he'd bet his sleeping bag was responsible for the 'convenient' technology malfunctions during the incident. The bewilderment— and fear— on Hawks's face was too genuine to be faked. He stared at his hands as if he expected them to glow with golden lightning again and a slither of unease crossed his expression. He covered it up and sat there, saying nothing.

"*Well*?" Aizawa asked coldly. "Would you like to explain that?"

"Don't know…" Aizawa could see Hawks's struggle to enunciate his words. "...explanation."

Again, he used that toneless voice. It rankled at Aizawa's already fried nerves. He stepped closer, eyes red as his Quirk activated.

"Give me one good reason I should not send you to interrogation right now."

Hawks stared at him, unblinking. His mouth was shut tight, not out of defiance, but that empty resignation. This was not the meek acceptance of a timid man or the bitter and silent mutiny of a rebellious soul. It was something else. Something much more concerning.

Aizawa's anger drained away, leaving exhaustion behind. He dragged a hand through his hair.

"Eri wants to see you, you know."

Hawks turned white as a sheet. "No Eri."

Aizawa did a double take. "Excuse me?"

Hawks's eyes were downcast and his hands were clasped placidly in front of him, almost like he was wearing invisible handcuffs. "Pl'se don' hu— Don' ask me q'stions 'n front of Eri."

Other than the obvious slurring, there was something *off* about his response but now was not the time to think about it.

"Fine." Aizawa said curtly. He noticed the sleeve had fallen again. "Would you *fix* that?"

Hawks winced and yanked it back up. It immediately fell again. "Sorry. It's weird on my w'ngs."

Aizawa's stress-fueled annoyance bubbled back up and boiled over. "Then take it *off*."

He grabbed the sleeve and yanked it back into place. Hawks recoiled like he had been burned. He abruptly turned away from Aizawa, hunching his shoulders, and locked his jaw as if he were bracing for a blow.

Seeing his reaction made something click in Aizawa's mind and his remaining anger— and fear— drained away. For someone who scoffed at illogical fallacies, he was truly blind. He knew what happened with Hawks and the Commission. Toshinori had told him himself.

Hawks did not think he was going to be questioned.

He thought he was going to be *tortured*, or at the very least, aggressively interrogated.

Aizawa may be ruthless with Villains but he never beat up prisoners for information. He knew there were Heroes that did, and the Commission's lackeys were at the top of that list. Among them was 'Amplifier', the man with a pain-enhancing Quirk.

Aizawa put together some of Hawks's odder responses and his stomach twisted. Had Hawks believed Aizawa would hurt Eri to force him to give the answers he wanted to hear?

Hawks took a few deep breaths and spoke, each word slow and carefully enunciated. "I don't know what that glow was. I swear I don't. But I-I—" His back straightened. "I p-promise it will not affect my performance at work."

Aizawa wished he had Present Mic's Quirk. Because if he did, he would have an excuse to scream and break things. He might even have the excuse to scream at Commission headquarters and shatter every single window in their hellspawn of an office. But the Commission may not be the only ones responsible for what was wrong with Hawks.

Aizawa steeled himself and went for the throat. "Toshinori told me someone used a possession Quirk on you."

Hawks's face went blank but his golden eyes widened with horror.

"Hawks, that is a *very* serious offense. And… based on what happened with the yakuza, it may have had lasting side-effects. Eight people possessing you could lead to… problems."

Hawks began slowly shaking his head. Aizawa could not tell whether the movement was a conscious one or not.

"*Wrong*." Hawks croaked. He took a breath and gritted his teeth. "Toshinori doesn't have the whole story. It's not what you think. You're *wrong*."

"Then tell me how I'm wrong." Aizawa demanded. "Because from where I'm standing, you're either suffering after-effects from that possession incident or you've been someplace you shouldn't."

Hawks lowered his head and locks of golden hair fell over his eyes. "Is that the logical conclusion?"

His shadowed— almost ominous— features might have alarmed Aizawa if not for the slight tremble in his voice.

"It's the one I've reached with the facts I have." Aizawa said ruthlessly. "So again, I ask: What happened?"

Hawks's fragile mask slipped, revealing the desperation he'd been hiding. "I *don't know*."

"You know *something*." Aizawa snapped. He shoved the device he'd found into Hawks's line of sight. "You *know* what this is."

Hawks did not recoil this time but he turned his head away. His body was still braced in preparation for an attack.

Aizawa took a breath and forced his voice to soften. "Hawks, *please*. I know we are almost strangers, but Shoto, Tenya, Fumikage, and Eri all care deeply about you. I want to help you, but I can't do that if you lie to me."

"You won't believe me if I tell you the truth." Hawks whispered.

"Oh really? Try me." Aizawa dared him.

Hawks went silent. He stared at his hands as the seconds ticked by, and Aizawa let him mull over his options.

As much as Aizawa hated the idea, he could not let this stand. If Toshinori got what he wanted, Hawks would become involved at UA. It was Aizawa's duty as a Hero and teacher to make sure he was not a danger to the other people on campus. And whatever had come over Hawks during that fight with the yakuza? However he had— likely unknowingly— gotten that device that messed up the technology around them? That was *dangerous*.

Hawks's trembling hands closed into fists and Aizawa knew he had come to a decision.

"Well?" he asked testily.

Hawks slowly moved his gaze up so he looked Aizawa in the eye.

"I have eight other people in my head. They're Heroes from the future. Your students, specifically. They came back in time to stop the world from being destroyed."

Aizawa could not find his voice.

Hawks took this as a sign to continue and, with a shuddering breath, began to tell the tale of how he'd woken in the woods with eight other minds in his head.

And it was exactly that.

A *tale*.

Because there was *no way* this was real.

There was *no way* eight of his students had time traveled.

As Hawks listed events and information only Aizawa's students should know, red-hot fury simmered in the teacher's gut. How could someone have gotten such personal information about *his students*?

He forced his anger to remain in his head and off his face because Hawks was the *victim* in all this, whatever this was. He'd been targeted and either gaslighted or brainwashed into believing this… this illogical *fabrication*.

Despite his efforts, Aizawa's disbelief must have shown on his face because Hawks leaned away from him, fear flashing across his expression.

"I'm not crazy." he whispered. "I'm *not* brainwashed or making things up."

"I never said that." Aizawa soothed.

"You're *thinking* it." Hawks accused. He gave a short laugh. It was a bitter, broken sound. "So many people have fantastical abilities but you can't believe *this*?"

He touched his pillow with a feather and it began to *float*.

Like *Ochaco Uraraka's* Quirk.

Before Aizawa could leap from his chair, Hawks broke the feather and the pillow fell back to the bed. Aizawa's stomach dropped but he reminded himself that Uraraka was alright and still had her Quirk. So how did Hawks have it? Did someone give similar Quirks to him…?

Like the Nomu.

Suddenly, too many things made sense.

Hawks's disappearance, his unexplained Quirks, his 'drifting' and catatonia, why All Might's 'I am here!' catchphrase was a trigger, how Hawks was 'possessed' and the 'voices' in his head… It all made *sense* now.

Someone had tried to turn Hawks into a Nomu. Or had they forced just enough Quirks into him that his mind had merely cracked— but he had mostly *kept* it— unlike the broken, mindless beasts Aizawa had fought?

One thing was for certain; Hawks had no idea what had happened to him. Or he was so traumatized he had blocked out the memories.

"*Please*." Hawks's voice cracked and his shoulders shook as though he'd repressed a sob. "*Please* believe me."

Aizawa almost wished he could. But sympathy could not erase the picture Hawks's story painted.

"Hawks, you're clearly unwell." he said gently. "I don't know what stories these people have been feeding you, but none of it's true."

Hawks stared at him blankly like he could not process what he was hearing. Thankfully the color remained in his glazed golden eyes. If Aizawa made him catatonic again, Recovery Girl would never forgive him.

Aizawa carefully touched his arm with his fingertips. Hawks did not flinch away, so Aizawa placed his palm on his shoulder. Even through the thin cloth of the gown, Hawks's skin felt cold.

"You're not in trouble. I know none of this is your fault." Aizawa soothed him. "The brain is… *complicated*, and it can be tricked. But *it is not your fault*, Hawks. I won't punish you for telling me what happened and this can only remain between us, if you wish it. The Commission will not learn of this from me. Whether this is a Quirk or… something else, we'll get you help. Through counseling or… other means—" Would psychiatric medication and the like do anything for someone who may practically be a Nomu? "—I will *help* you. I promise."

Hawks began to shake. He wasn't crying, but his eyes were glassy with tears he refused to let fall.

"Does 'help' involve locking me in a mental institution like Endeavor did with Shoto's mom?" he croaked.

"He *what?*" Aizawa shook himself. "Don't change the subject."

"I'm *not*." Hawks snapped at him. His voice came out choked, as if he were trying not to raise it to a scream. "I only know that because I have a future version of Shoto is *in my head!*"

"No you don't." Aizawa said levelly. "None of that is real, Hawks."

It may be cold and to some, heartless to be so blunt, but it needed to be said. Hawks's expression crumpled. For a second, Aizawa thought he might actually cry. His breathing quickened and he hunched over, wrapping his arms around himself and struggled to fill his lungs with air.

Before Aizawa could call for Recovery Girl, his breathing evened out and his arms fell to his sides.

Hawks looked up, and sharp, narrowed golden eyes locked with Aizawa's.

"What the *hell* is wrong with you? You made Gold fucking *drift,* asshole."

Aizawa's eyes turned red and his hair floated up as he activated Erasure.

The person in control of Hawks's body eyed him with dismissive irritation, lips twisted into a sneer. "That won't make me leave."

Aizawa let his Quirk deactivate as he calculated how quickly he could get his capture weapon out. Did this usurper have Hawks's speed? "Who are you?"

Hawks's body grinned with too many teeth and he cocked his head, crossing his arms arrogantly— or confidently?— over his chest. "King Explosion Murder."

Aizawa repressed a twitch.

Hawks's body's smirk widened almost mockingly. "Actually, that didn't become my Hero name because you and Midnight vetoed it. *Assholes*. I actually went by 'Ground Zero' during school but changed it to 'Nitro' after UA fell since shitty Deku thought Ground Zero was inappropriate."

A dark look passed over his features before his grin returned. His smile was not a nice one. In fact, it was on the verge of cruel, but it was too familiar to Aizawa to appear villainous.

"Don't play dumb with me." Aizawa breathed. "Who. Are. You?"

"*You're* the one playing dumb." The smirk became a recognizable, near-feral grin. "I'm Katsuki Bakugo, a time traveler from the future you and your 'logical fallacies' don't believe in. Nice to see you alive again, *sensei*."

XXXXXXX

Miruko barely got the key into the door for her apartment before she shoved it open, giving the piece of wood only the minimum amount of time to fall before her or risk being torn open. If she had pushed the bolt through the frame, she'd have to pay for it, but paying for a broken door was the least of her worries.

Hawks had woken up and although he was still a little… out of it, Miruko wanted to get back to him and UA as soon as possible.

But first she wanted to get him some new clothes.

Miruko hated the idea of leaving while Eraserhead questioned— *interrogated*— her friend, but she knew if she stayed outside that room she would barge in and likely deck the Underground Hero.

Yeah yeah, she knew he had questions and Hawks seemed willing to answer, but Hawks looked awful and did not seem to understand that he *didn't need* to be questioned right now. Eraserhead was not the Commission, who expected a timely report unless their agent was unconscious and literally incapable of giving one. Eraserhead would not punish Hawks for

his 'tardiness' even though he kept staring at Hawks like he was *scum* on the bottom of his shoe—

Okay, Miruko was *really* going to have to work hard to not punch Eraserhead. Or kick him.

She busied herself with getting Hawks clothes, shoving his to-be-sold box of Endeavor merch aside as she dug through the other containers. She picked out a pair of comfortable jeans, a t-shirt and a hoodie with a loose, slightly raised collar. Hawks was always soothed by clothing that covered his throat.

As she inched out of the closet— she really needed to get Hawks his own space here— she knocked into a precariously-placed box. Naturally, it tipped over and she muttered an expletive that was rather unnecessary. She didn't care, because she could damn curse at an inanimate object if she wanted to.

Miruko glowered at the spilled boxers all over her closet floor and slammed the other clothes down on the couch with unneeded force. She began picking them up, shoving them unceremoniously back into the box.

A gleaming blue haze caught her eye and she paused, brow furrowing. Did Hawks have a weird flashlight or glow stick in there or something?

What is…?

Miruko pulled out the gleaming object. Her body went rigid from her ear tips to her toes and heart crawled into her throat. She stared at the sleek, glowing gun she'd found in Hawks's things as her hands began to shake.

Where did Hawks get a gun?

Why did he have one?

Why *hide it* from her?

Her mind jumped to an answer to all those questions and her ribs seemed to squeeze the air from her lungs. Could he be—?

She forced out a breath. *Okay, calm down and think about this. Yes, Hawks is having some problems, but he's not suicidal.* She considered Hawks's Commission-ingrained need to sacrifice his life and safety for others and amended that thought. *He's not **actively** suicidal. So why does he have **this**?*

Miruko carefully studied the gun, taking in its sleek, almost futuristic design, and realized this was the type of thing given to Heroes as support gear. Except support gear usually was not meant for killing. Miruko tried to tell herself that the gun may be a kind of stunner, but her gut was telling her it wasn't.

Why does Hawks have a weapon like this? Where did he get it?

Staring at the gun gave her no answers so Miruko shoved it back into the box and picked up Hawks's clothes again. She'd ask him herself once they were alone— as in not in UA or her bug-filled apartment. She shut the closet door and checked to make sure she had her keys before heading back towards her front door.

Before she could reach it, her phone chimed. She instantly pulled it from her pocket and checked the screen in case it was Hawks or UA. The number said 'Unknown', but she could see the message on her lock screen.

'*You want to answer our call, Miruko.'*

The message was rather cryptic, and usually Miruko would dismiss it as spam and ignore it, but her instincts *screamed* at her that was a bad idea. So when her phone rang and said the caller was an unknown number, she answered.

"Hello?"

"*Hello, Miruko."* the President of the Hero Commission said pleasantly. *"I am just calling to thank you for housing Hawks for these past weeks."*

Miruko knew that was a lie. She could not bring herself to call the President on her bullshit. Not this time, when unexplained dread made her skin feel cold.

"*I know the Icarus Project can be rather… difficult to deal with."* the President continued in a tone some may mistake for soothing. *"But you have dealt with its malfunctions and appalling lack of emotional restraint admirably. However, your services are no longer required—"*

"No."

"*Excuse me?"* the President asked with that *fake* pleasantness Miruko loathed.

"You're *not* forcing Hawks into a new apartment that he'll drown in *more* debt for." Miruko snarled.

"*No, we're not."* the President agreed, and alarm bells *screamed* in Miruko's head. *"You'll find **its** new residence will be much more… unpleasant."*

Miruko's body jerked towards the door.

"*Please do not try to run with it, Miruko."* the President sighed. *"We will have no choice but to hunt you down, you see. For the good of the public, of course. The Icarus Project is too much of a threat to let go."*

"Don't give me that bullshit." Miruko breathed. "Hawks hasn't done anything."

"*But it **has**."* the President said icily, finally letting her cold ruthlessness slip through. *"It **exists**. Did you know the Icarus Project has access to multiple Quirks? Like the Nomu?"*

Miruko hardly blinked. The President could tell her that Hawks was secretly a Villain and Miruko would not give a *damn*.

"He's *not* a Nomu." she said with certainty.

"*I agree."* the President said pleasantly. *"But I believe the experts at our laboratory would be able to run some tests, just to be sure. I admit, some of the procedures would be rather invasive, but I'm certain they could stitch* ***it*** *closed again."*

Miruko wanted to throw up. She wanted to scream at her that they would never touch Hawks. She wanted to tell her that Hawks was a *person*, not a toy to take apart and break under her boot. Instead she forced herself to *think*, because the Commission had called her for a reason instead of simply taking Hawks to a lab the first chance they got—

Comprehension came like a slap to the face.

They're blackmailing ***me***, Miruko realized. *They want me to make a deal in exchange for Hawks's safety.*

Even though she knew the apartment building was a comfortable temperature, she felt cold, as if she'd been shoved out into a winter storm. She did not let the cold freeze her, because she'd already been silent for too long.

"That is unnecessary." Miruko said, and her voice was surprisingly toneless, even to herself. "Hawks is not a threat to anyone and you *know* it. So let's stop pretending that's why you called, yeah?" She swallowed the lump in her throat. "What do you want me to do?"

Even though she could not see the President's face, Miruko knew she was smiling.

Keep Moving Forward

Chapter Notes

Warning: Lots of swearing in this one, courtesy of Guess Who.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Deku was rambling at him. Katsuki Bakugo was too used to Midoriya's stupid mumbling to be too annoyed, but he still found himself rolling his eyes. Aizawa's attempts to use his Quirk to make him vanish were even more eye-rolling. It was Aizawa's fault Bakugo had to take control in the first place.

Hawks had become so freaked out by Aizawa's stubbornness— not helped by Half and Half's own freaking out as he emerged in time for Aizawa to mention 'help'— he had started drifting, dragging Half and Half and the General Studies bastard down with him. Uraraka and Deku had managed to stick around though. Knowing them, it was pure stubbornness. And maybe a bit of fear.

Midoriya's panicked thought that they might become catatonic again if no one was in control spurred Bakugo into action and he slipped into the driver's seat. Hawks had not even stirred. So here Bakugo was, in the flesh. Not his flesh, but good enough, he supposed. Hawks's body was more than capable of throwing a punch if Aizawa needed a fist or three to the face. Once, Bakugo would never have dared to think about socking his teacher, but if Aizawa was going to be stubborn then he needed a good whack on the head.

"That's still not going to work."

"I've noticed." Aizawa said dryly.

Hearing his terse, protective tone again might have made Bakugo cry if he were Deku. But he wasn't Deku, and loathe as he was to admit it, he may be running on a time limit. He crossed his arms— damn, it felt good to have two arms again— and leaned back, raising his eyebrow. Aizawa's gaze zeroed in on the movement and Bakugo knew his every action was being carefully scrutinized. His posture, his way of speaking, his expression, his tone. The signs he was Katsuki Bakugo were all there if Aizawa would get his head out of his ass and look for them. Bakugo did not bother to hold back an impatient scowl.

"We've wasted enough time. What do I need to make you see we're who we say we are? And don't ask to see Explosion. Our Quirks got fucked up from the transfer so they're not an exact match."

"Of course they're not." Aizawa said coolly.

Bakugo barked a laugh. "You're losing your touch, sensei. Your suspicious tone's so obvious. So why haven't you called Fatgum or Toshinori yet? Yeah, we all know he's All Might."

Aizawa was tense. Bakugo could see it in the way his jaw clenched.

He continued as if he had not noticed. "Hawks doesn't know though. He needs someone to talk to without being all stupidly self-conscious so don't you go telling him."

"You're keeping secrets from him?" Aizawa asked in that level 'trying to keep the situation from escalating' tone of his. Stubborn, wonderful, overprotective asshole.

"No shit. Gold is strong but we aren't gonna drown him." Bakugo's smirk grew bitter. "We do enough of that already."

"I presume 'Gold' is Hawks?"

Aizawa was fishing for information. It was clear as day. But Bakugo wasn't exactly objecting. Aizawa needed to get his head out of the sand or they might have to sic Shinso on him. To brainwash or slug some sense into their dearest teacher, who could say? Bakugo knew his former teacher could be skeptical but *come on*.

"Yeah. We got color names for shitty secret identity reasons. It's more of a game now. Gotta have fun somehow. I'm 'Orange'. Deku is 'Green'. Uraraka is 'Pink'. Half and Half is 'White'. Four-eyes is 'Silver'. Sparky is 'Yellow'. Pontytail girl is 'Red'. She made that technology-busting device by the way. Your shitty purple-haired apprentice is 'Purple', *obviously*." Bakugo bared his teeth. "And don't tell Gold who I am. I'm one of the two he hasn't figured out and I'm not fucking losing. Don't you ruin this for me, asshole."

"Hawks is unaware then?" Aizawa asked because of course he did.

"No fucking shit he's 'unaware'. *You made him drift.*" Bakugo enunciated. "He's so freaked out he dragged Half and Half and your shitty apprentice down with him." Something flickered through Aizawa's expression. "Yeah, that's why Gold kept calling mini-him 'Purple'."

Aizawa remained silent. If Bakugo were nicer, he may give him time to try to process what he was being told. But he was Bakugo and Aizawa was being overprotective, so screw that.

"Are you done being an overly-skeptical dumbass? Or are you gonna finally call the others in and see how that goes?" He cocked his head. "You still didn't answer why you haven't called them yet to restrain poor brainwashed wittle Hawks."

"I don't know." Aizawa said steadily, and Bakugo knew he had him.

He snorted. "Don't delude yourself. It's because you know we're telling the truth, sensei."

Aizawa twitched. His hand gripped his capture weapon.

"If you try to restrain me I'll just break out." Bakugo continued casually. "Like that time you stopped me from attacking shitty Deku. We became real friends, you know. Are you fucking

happy to hear your kiddies get along someday?"

"*Kacchan..."*

Deku sounded *touched*. He'd forgotten the nerd could hear him. Shit.

Shut the fuck up, Deku.

And now Deku was touched *and* amused. Shitty nerd, acting all mushy and shit.

Bakugo glanced at his sensei— tired, worn, but nowhere near as defeated as his future self. A foreign feeling twisted his gut and he wondered if he should tell Aizawa what happened to one of *his* best friends.

"*Don't."* Deku whispered. *"You know how he reacted last time."*

Bakugo forced away the memory of Aizawa's limp body, his eyelids open but empty. Shitty sensei had always lectured them for acting recklessly to save their friends, yet that exact kind of recklessness cost him his life. Damn *hypocrite*. Bakugo blinked rapidly and rubbed at Hawks's stupid teary eyes.

"What was that golden light?" Aizawa demanded abruptly.

Unfortunately for him, Bakugo had no information to let slip so he merely shrugged. "Not a clue. Not even Deku knows."

Aizawa seemed to accept that answer. "Say I do believe you…" And there it was. Take *that*, Gold. It all turned out fine. Mostly. With a few huge scares along the way but Bakugo would never admit that out loud or where Hawks could hear him. "…what do you expect me to do?"

"Help us stop our future from happening. If you don't, you'll have a lot more graves to visit. If you survive, that is." Bakugo said flatly. He noticed Aizawa's stiff expression and curled his lips into a sneer. "What? Did you think we time traveled for *fun*? Everything went to hell. We were the only survivors. Us and Eri but…" His jaw clenched. "…Shigaraki got her as she was sending us back."

"You know what her Quirk does." Aizawa breathed.

"Yeah. And we couldn't tell anyone because we feared we'd be shipped to a mental institution and drugged to hell. Or get Gold's head cut open so they could look at his brain. It's so funny how *that almost happened*." Bakugo did not soften his tone in the slightest and was a bit vindictively pleased when Aizawa winced. He felt Hawks stir and glanced at the clock. "Gold is waking up. You better fucking apologize to him cause I don't want to deal with him freaking out. You know, he was so damn optimistic people would believe him but then you pulled *that* bullshit. It—" *Reminds me of Deku.* "—makes me sick."

Aizawa did not look chastised, though he did appear uncomfortable. "I—"

"I don't wanna hear it." Bakugo interrupted. "You may be insufferable but I trust you, sensei. You're… a good Hero. You taught me a lot." He dug his nails into his arms— Hawks's arms.

Whoops. "Don't expect a thanks. Deku's stupid nostalgia must be infecting me or something."

Aizawa's features softened for the first time that day. "Of course not."

Bakugo nodded curtly. "We'll give you the details of our plans later. For now, gotta go since Sleeping Birdie's waking up."

He felt Hawks regain awareness and instantly gave control back to him. He may be an asshole, but he wasn't cruel. And keeping hold of Hawks's body after he'd just went through Aizawa's stupidity episode? As Four Eyes would say, that would just be unheroic.

XXXXXXX

Hawks blinked and carefully took in his surroundings, relaxing when he saw he was still in Recovery Girl's office and not in a cold or padded cell. Aizawa was seated in a seat next to his bed, looking as if he had aged a decade in— Hawks checked the clock— twenty minutes. He and the underground Hero stared at each other awkwardly, as Hawks slowly came to understand that Aizawa was not going to grab him and drag him to a mental hospital.

He licked his dry lips nervously. "What happened?"

Aizawa looked away from him. "I believe you."

Hawks's brain refused to compute that statement and his thoughts screeched to a halt. "… Huh?"

Aizawa shifted in his seat. "'Orange' spoke to me and gave me proof of your claims."

"*You bet I did!"* Orange snarled. *"Asshole."*

Hawks winced. "How much did he cuss you out?"

"I believe I have heard more swears in the past few minutes than in the past decade." Aizawa said dryly.

Hawks slowly comprehended that he was joking. That had to be a good sign, right? Or was it a trick to get him to let his guard down?

"*If it is, I'm kicking his ass."*

"*You will not."* Silver lectured. He was back too? Hawks nervously eyed the fragile walls inside his head but they did not crumble. Yet.

"*Wanna bet?"* Orange challenged.

Hawks forced himself out of his head and was relieved that little time had passed. He bowed as much as he could in the bed. "I apologize for his behavior."

Aizawa shrugged. "I'm used to it."

Hawks's breath caught. "So he *is* one of your students then?"

"*SHITTY FUCKING SENSEI I TOLD YOU NOT TO—"*

"***Volume**, Orange!"* Pink snapped.

Hawks put his aching head in his hands.

"Headache?" Aizawa asked sympathetically.

Hawks nodded. Aizawa handed him an aspirin. Or what he hoped was an aspirin. He reluctantly took it and— upon remaining conscious— shifted nervously. "So… you really believe us, then?"

Aizawa sighed. "Yes. I'm not going to drag you to a psych ward or an interrogation room."

Hawks covered a wince with a smile. Was he that obvious? "Cool. That's nice to hear."

Aizawa hesitated and slowly sat on the bed next to him. "I apologize for my impulsive reaction. I was… concerned for my students' safety."

Hawks's smile became real. "You actually *admitted* it. Red, make a recording device, quick! I need this moment immortalized."

Red laughed but did not oblige him. He made sure she knew he was pouting.

And okay, *maybe* he was exaggerating his default jokeyness a bit to try to hide how his heart still pounded and his hands were shaking where he hid them in the blankets but who cared about that

Aizawa rolled his eyes and rose from his perch. "Get some sleep. Your neurologist appointment is in the morning."

XXXXXXX

Hawks got zero hours of sleep that night.

Despite Aizawa and the voices' reassurances, he dare not let himself fall asleep. The fear that he would wake up in a cell haunted his and the voices' thoughts through the night. Because while they wanted to trust Aizawa, there was always the chance he did not believe them and was merely playing along with their 'delusions' to make them lower their guard.

Hawks thought he knew what he was afraid of, but apparently being locked away because no one believed him was now on his list. If not for Orange's decisive actions, they might be in a padded cell or cuffed to an interrogation room table right now. Or on some shady doctor's operating table. Their decision to reveal the truth had nearly resulted in the worst case scenario and Hawks could not quite shake the fear from the near-disaster.

Even as dawn passed and he walked out of UA, he was half-convinced Aizawa, Toshinori, and Recovery Girl were taking him to a psych ward instead of to a neurologist. He got into

the car with some reluctance and resisted the urge to tap his foot or yank out feathers. Guess he was more stressed than he thought.

If someone comes at me with a syringe, I'm going out the window.

"*If someone comes at you with a syringe you probably won't see them in time."* Green mused.

Thanks, Green. I definitely needed to hear that.

"*...Sorry."*

Aizawa began the too-short drive to the neurology office. As buildings, cars, and pedestrians passed by, Recovery Girl told Hawks what would happen and what to expect during the visit. Unfortunately this MRI was not the most accommodating for heteromorph-types so he would have to ditch his wings during the scan. The MRI would be cramped even without them on his back. That did not make Hawks feel much better but he was glad she told him before he arrived.

Are any of you claustrophobic?

"*I don't think so?"* Yellow said questioningly.

"*With our bad luck, probably."* Purple said at the same time.

Hawks repressed a sigh. *Great.*

The tense silence in the car was unexpectedly broken as his cell phone played a gratingly happy tune. He and Toshinori both jumped and the tall man's head smacked into the roof of the car.

Hawks winced. "Oops. I thought I had that on silent."

He picked it up and found he did indeed have it on silent. But it was Mockingjay calling, which meant she'd *made* it ring using some of her less-legal contacts. Katniss only did that if she was desperate to get in contact with him. Hawks's stomach tried to crawl out of his mouth. He answered.

"Hi, Kat—"

"*Where are you right now?"*

Some might think her lack of greeting was rude, but Hawks could hear the viciously controlled fear in her harsh voice. A bundle of thorny vines gathered in his stomach.

"I'm with Eraserhead, Toshinori, and Recovery Girl. We're headed to a…" He realized Mockingjay had been kept out of the loop and cringed. "…neurologist."

Mockingjay paused and he heard her take a calming breath. *"I'll ask later. Right now, you need to* ***stay*** *with them, okay? I'm sending Miruko to you."*

Hawks's first thought was the Commission had found out about his Quirk acting up. The dull dread became icy fear and Hawks gripped the phone.

"A-Am I being sent to remedial courses?"

The response in his head was instantaneous. In the back of his mind, Green, White, Red, Purple, and Silver began planning how to get him out of the country while Pink and Yellow tried to send calming feelings his way and Orange cussed up a storm between strategies.

"*We won't let them hurt you."* they chanted. *"We won't let them hurt you we won't let them hurt you we won't—"*

"*No, you're not."* Mockingjay said, but there was no reassurance in her tone. *"Hawks, Norito Kaetsu has been released from prison."*

"You've been a bad little Hero. Let's fix that."

Hawks's mouth went dry. He swallowed hard. "Oh." Mindful of his company, he forced his voice to remain level. "Thanks for warning me."

"*Who's 'Norito Kaetsu'?"* Silver asked innocently.

Hawks repressed a flinch. *Don't think don't think don't think—*

"*Gold?"* Pink asked worriedly.

"*Hawks? Are you still there?"* Mockingjay asked.

"I'm listening." Hawks's voice came out smaller than he would like. He swallowed roughly. "I thought he was in prison for life. He— He got sent to *Tartarus* so he wouldn't be able to spill Commission secrets."

"*Apparently not. He got out on bail and 'good behavior'."* Mockingjay snarled. *"'Good behavior' my ass. As far as I can tell, the Commission released him last Wednesday. He might have been let out even earlier."*

Hawks's chest felt tight. He hunched over and breathed through his nose. "Does he have his job back?"

"*I don't know."* He heard the sound of pages being shuffled. *"Look, I can try to get a restraining order approved but it will be difficult— No. It'll be* ***impossible*** *to get one. His ledger has been wiped clean and even before that your name was kept out of his list of... crimes."*

Hawks knew she wanted to say 'victims'.

"Remember you deserve this."

"He didn't get to do anything." Hawks insisted.

"*Because I got him thrown in jail."* Mockingjay snarled. *"But now he's out again and it seems the Commission is backing him."* Her voice softened. *"You know what that means."*

Hawks could not form a reply. Yes, he knew what it meant. It was another message, a gun to his head, and a *dare* for him to react in a way the Commission did not approve of. His hands were shaking and sweaty for some reason and his lungs felt like they were crushing his heart. He could hear the voices asking questions at the back of his mind but could not understand anything they were saying. Their emotions and words were covered by a haze of static. How strange that was.

"He didn't get to do anything." he forced out again. He wasn't lying because it was the truth and *nothing had happened.*

"*I know. And I **won't** let him."*

"Don't shoot him." Hawks whispered. "You can't get in trouble. Not for me."

Mockingjay did not reply to that. *"Be careful. If the Commission calls you, make up an excuse. I don't care if you're sitting and twiddling your thumbs at home; Say you have an important mission and aren't available. **Don't** go to them."*

"They'll know I'm lying." Hawks said. His voice was distant to his own ears.

"*Do **not**. Go to them."* Mockingjay emphasized.

"Okay." Hawks agreed. For some reason his voice shook. How weird.

Mockingjay hung up. Hawks stared at the phone as it disconnected from the call and returned to the home page. A hand brushed his and he jumped, yanking his away as he pressed himself against the door of the car. Toshinori leaned towards the window on his side to give him space and did not bother hiding the worry on his face.

"Hawks—?"

"I'm fine." Hawks said before he could ask anything.

"You do not seem fine." Toshinori said gently. "You're shaking."

Hawks hid his hands in his pockets. "Funny thing, that."

"Who is Norito Kaetsu?" Aizawa asked, unknowingly echoing Silver. He barely flinched as Recovery Girl jabbed him with her cane.

Hawks reflexively pulled at his collar and yanked his sleeves down. He glanced hesitantly at Aizawa's reflection in the car's rear-view mirror. "He was one of my martial arts… managers at the Commission. He was… a bit…" He trailed off. "…creepy."

"Being 'creepy' does not get people sent to Tartarus." Aizawa said stoically.

Hawks winced and yanked at his collar again, making sure it was up as far as it could go. "He… might have killed a couple people? I don't know if he actually did or the Commission claimed he did to make sure he'd never be released. I mean, he was a sniper, so of course he killed people but he might have killed people without the Commission's permission which is a big difference in their book. He job was to be a sniper and one of my martial arts han— managers but he liked knives too. Not that he threatened me with any knives or anything because the Commission didn't want him to cut me up. N-Not that he threatened to cut me up or anything. He didn't do that. Did I say that already?" Hawks knew he was rambling. He could feel Aizawa, Toshinori, and Recovery Girl's judgmental gazes on him and hunched his shoulders. "He… He was also arrested and convicted for harassment and stuff, okay? He was convinced I was secretly a girl and kept… bothering me. And following me. Obsessively. Katniss got him arrested before anything happened and my name was kept out of the case."

Horror and understanding rippled through him. It was not his own.

"*Gold…?"* Red whispered.

Hawks pulled at his shirt again and crossed his arms over his chest, forcing away memories of his handler pinning him down during sparring sessions with a knife to his neck, and the aftermath of those sessions where Hawks actually had permission to lock the door to make sure Kaetsu would not 'accidentally' walk in. There was ~~[illegible]~~ The voices' shock and disgust told him they saw it and he ducked his head, cheeks burning with shame.

"I can avoid him." Hawks told the back of Aizawa's seat. "And I know some tricks to get him to back off. I've done it before. He's a creep, but he's not a stalker or anything. He might not even be interested in getting revenge on me since he doesn't know Mockingjay got him exposed. And I'm not stuck at HQ so much so it'll be easier to avoid him."

"What's his Quirk?" Aizawa asked.

~~"You deserve this."~~

Hawks shrugged helplessly. "I never found out. And the Commission won't tell me."

"And why not?" Toshinori demanded. "It's standard procedure. We have protocols for this since released Villains often go after the Heroes that put them away. Why isn't the Commission sending a protection detail?"

Hawks shot him a befuddled look. "Didn't you hear Mockingjay? The Commission released him."

The enraged looks on their faces made him realize that no, they had *not* heard that part of the conversation. Hawks continued to intensely study the back of Aizawa's seat.

"Like I said, I don't know if he's been reinstated at the Commission." he told it. "And if he has, I'm not at HQ as much. I'll be fine."

"We don't just want you to be 'fine'." Toshinori snapped. "We want you to be *safe*." His eyes gleamed with a ferocious blue light. "We are going to help you."

Afraid to speak or contradict him, Hawks merely nodded in feigned agreement so they would let it go.

Their arrival at the neurologist was rather quiet and somber. Even the voices barely made a sound as Hawks followed Recovery Girl and Aizawa into the building and up to Doctor Atsushi Chida's office. Toshinori was left waiting outside, likely to see when Miruko and Mockingjay showed up.

The voices were getting anxious, but thankfully their walls were holding enough for Hawks to function. Still, their fear was infectious. What would the brain scans reveal?

Doctor Atsushi Chida was a middle-aged man with red hair, fox ears, yellow eyes, and a rather pointed face. The hand that shook Hawks's had black claw-like nails and Hawks thought he might have a fox tail under his coat. His smile was kind as he greeted Recovery Girl like an old friend and he hardly blinked when a noise made Hawks jump and nearly knock over a container of pamphlets on his desk with his wings.

The pre-MRI period passed by in a blur, and before Hawks knew it, he was faced with a machine that looked more like a space pod or solitary confinement than medical equipment.

Like Recovery Girl said, Hawks was asked to remove his earrings and clothes, changing into the metal-free scrubs provided for him. He detached his feathers and put them in a container meant for such things, trusting himself not to panic and summon them during the procedure while knowing Aizawa could stop him if he tried. That thought was more reassuring than it would have been a few days ago.

He laid down on the thin MRI table and eyed the small space he would be stuck in for the next half-hour. As an IV with contrast solution was inserted into his arm, Doctor Chida gave him a reassuring smile.

"Are you still feeling okay?"

"Yes." Hawks said shortly.

"You'll need to stay as still as possible during the scan." Chida reminded him. "You can close your eyes and let your mind wander, if you wish."

"*Oh yeah, great idea."* Orange said flatly. *"Let's go fucking catatonic again."*

Hawks repressed a grimace. "That's probably not a good idea." he said steadily.

Chida inclined his head in acknowledgment. He handed Hawks ear plugs and he put them in.

"I will be able to speak with you via intercom. Use this if you need me immediately." He gave Hawks an emergency call button. "Are you ready?"

No. "Sure."

They began, and okay maybe Hawks or one of the voices was claustrophobic because the walls of the machine were way too close. He shut his eyes and focused on not moving. The machine made a loud, extended buzzing noise, paused, made a few low banging sounds, and kept buzzing. A low clicking noise joined the buzzing and Hawks's stomach twisted with anxiety.

"*We're okay."* Pink soothed him. *"We're all okay."*

"*I'm not."* Yellow said shakily.

"*Go into the dorms if you need to."* Silver offered.

Hawks felt Yellow retreat. He wished he could go with him. The buzzing and clicking kept going and he heard a knocking sound again. *Tap tap tap tap tap.* The noise drilled its way into his skull and his breathing quickened.

"*Did you know that there are Quirks that let people see all the colors on the spectrum, including 'forbidden' ones?"* Green said suddenly. *"Colors like red-green and yellow-blue actually exist, but human eyes are incapable of perceiving them since they 'cancel' each other out. There was a Hero with a Quirk that allowed them to naturally see these colors, and they used it to solve a spree of crimes because the culprit's costume was actually red-green. The culprit had a similar type of Quirk to the Hero, so they thought no one would notice. But they did, so they got them."*

"*That's very interesting, Green."* Red said genuinely.

"*So even a shitty Quirk like that can be useful."* Orange mused. *"Who knew?"*

"*Orange, what have we said about calling other Quirks worthless?"* Silver asked sternly.

"*Screw you I can do what I want."*

"***Orange**, considering yourself superior due to your Quirk is very unheroic—"*

"*Can it, tinhead."*

"*He has a point."* White mused.

"*Say that to my face. I dare you."*

Yellow poked his head back out, likely drawn in by their amusing argument.

"*How would I say that to your face?*" White asked innocently. *"We are voices."*

"*You damn Half and Half bastard! You're not **that** obtuse. We have bodies."*

"*Do we?"* Green mused. *"Or are they merely fabricated creations in our likeness?"*

"*Don't you start getting existential with me, you damn nerd."*

"*I wasn't!"* Green yelped.

"*Ugh, not again."* Purple groaned. *"Will you two be quiet?"*

Hawks wondered if Orange's cusses would show up on the MRI.

"*Do you really think Aizawa believes us?"* Pink blurted. She winced. *"Oops. I meant to share a funny story…"*

"*How about when Aizawa threatened to expel us for the millionth time?"* Yellow asked far too brightly.

"*You are far too blasé about that."* Silver scolded.

"*How can I not be? He threatened to expel us every other week."*

"*That's true."* Purple acknowledged. *"Remember that time he almost expelled our entire class because of the rescue mission?"*

Green shivered. *"I think he meant it that time."*

"*Our."* Red said suddenly.

"*Hmm?"* Green questioned.

"*Um, I was just remembering our final exam against Aizawa, White."* Red clarified.

"*He tied me up."* White said gravely.

"*Like a birthday present."* Orange cackled.

"*I was not a birthday gift."* White denied. *"It was no one's birthday."* He frowned. *"Was it someone's birthday and I did not know?"*

Yellow gave a mischievous giggle.

"*No."* Silver reassured White before Yellow could say anything.

Yellow sulked.

Hawks did not know whether it was on purpose or not, but the voices' antics proved to be a good distraction and he got through the rest of the procedure without a freak out. Still, the tightness in his chest eased when he was let out of that awful machine.

Chida smiled at him as he helped him sit up. "There. All done. You did well."

"Hmm." Hawks mumbled. He rubbed his arms, feeling cold. "I don't have to do that again, right?"

"Hopefully not." Chida said lightly. "You can return on Tuesday and we'll discuss your results."

Didn't doctors normally say they would call first and inform the patient if such an appointment was necessary? Did that mean they already thought something was wrong?

Hawks shoved his unease away. "Thank you."

He was more happy than what was probably polite to be out of that office.

But before Hawks could run out of the building to freedom, Recovery Girl spoke.

"Hawks, may I speak with you a moment before we go?"

Hawks slowed down and lingered, waiting for Recovery Girl to halt at his side. Aizawa meandered ahead, obviously lingering, but kept walking when she shot him a glare. Recovery Girl waited until the Underground Hero was around the corner to nudge Hawks towards an empty room. Hawks let her guide him inside, keeping an eye out for people with stabby syringes or chloroform.

"She wouldn't do anything like that." Green reassured him.

Hawks was not sure whether to believe that or not. Green did not take his disbelief personally and Hawks had the sneaking suspicion he was taking a page from Aizawa's patented 'I want to say something but I won't because reasons. However, know you are Wrong' book. Recovery Girl glanced around the room and seemed to find it satisfactory.

"I'm sorry for keeping you since you are so eager to leave, but I'd like to discuss something with you in private and I know your apartment is not a good place for such conversations." Her eyebrow quirked upward. "I also know you'd rather not return to my office at UA."

Hawks hid a wince with a sheepish smile. "Am I that obvious?"

"Perhaps." She paused, lips pressed thin, placed a hand on his knee. "You don't need to be honest with me if you are uncomfortable, but I cannot simply ignore my instincts."

Hawks's smile froze on his face as possibilities rampaged through his mind.

She told the Commission about my problems.

She knows about the voices and thinks I'm crazy.

Aizawa told her things and she doesn't believe me and thinks I'm a Nomu.

She wants me to go into a psych ward or take some medication that'll mess up my head.

She wants me to pay her back for the cost of treating me and putting up with me for the weekend.

*Something is really, **really** wrong and I'm actually dying—*

"You withheld the truth earlier." Recovery Girl continued gently. That had to be a good sign since she would not sound kind if she was upset with him— "Your handler— Kaetsu— did

more than follow you. He hurt you personally, didn't he?"

"You deserve this!"

Hawks's thoughts jumbled into a panicked mess. He tried to speak. No sound came out but he noticed this time so that was nice it would be awkward if he didn't notice that he hadn't spoken and kept trying to speak while making a fool of himself since good Heroes were supposed to smile and reassure they were not supposed to act like stupid, pathetic children who dared to think they knew better than the people who raised and housed and taught them *did you think we wouldn't notice your bad thoughts you ungrateful little—*

"Nothing happened." Hawks stated.

She did not believe him. He could tell so he dropped his gaze and rushed to clarify.

"It was just normal training things." Hawks reassured her like good Heroes were supposed to. His voice sounded a little weird. Perhaps it was his use of 'things' rather than specifics, but to his distant mind his tone almost sounded off-key and childish. "I know you guys keep trying to call it abuse but it wasn't. It was just training. Just training. Like… um…" Hawks tried to remember what exactly Kaetsu taught him and his mind went blank. "He just taught me normal Hero lessons when I was si— e-eighteen. You know? Like, uh. Hand to hand? That wasn't mean to sound like a question, my memory is just a bit fuzzy—"

She was staring at him.

Judging him.

She did not believe him at all.

Hawks shoved down his panic— *stupid*, he was better than this— and cleared his throat. "Thank you for your concern but you don't need to worry about me."

Recovery Girl was silent for too long so he risked another glance at her face.

She looked so impossibly sad as she firmly met his gaze. "No matter what he did, it was *not* your fault, Hawks."

He blinked at her in confusion and smiled widely enough that his cheeks ached. "Of course not. There's nothing to feel guilty about. Nothing happened."

Recovery Girl looked decades older than she had that morning. "I see. I suppose we have left Shota waiting long enough."

She patted his knee again and hobbled towards the door. Hawks followed her and immediately shoved the conversation out of his mind. He felt the voices' curiosity— and *fear* — but ignored them because there was nothing further to say. Nothing. Happened.

They met up with Aizawa and exited the claustrophobic building. Both Miruko and Mockingjay were waiting with Toshinori outside. Hawks's stomach dropped as he was forced to consider the reason for their presence.

Before he could speak, Toshinori silently held out his closed fist. Hawks hesitantly put his hand out and the older man dropped a lollipop into his palm. Hawks stared at it for a minute and looked up at him, raising his eyebrows.

"Really?" he said sarcastically.

"It's because you were a good boy for the doctor." Toshinori said with a throaty chuckle. "At least I hope you were." He looked to Aizawa. "He didn't kick him, did he?"

Aizawa's lips twitched suspiciously. "No."

Hawks stuck his tongue out at them. "Rude."

He unwrapped the lollipop— orange flavored— and stuck it in his mouth. He glanced at Mockingjay's smooth expression and cracked it between his teeth, ignoring Silver's horrified exclamation.

"So… about your call…"

"I don't know where Kaetsu is." Mockingjay said bluntly. "He was released and that's all I know, and I only know that because I kept tabs on him. His record was wiped completely clean. He may as well have been taking a vacation the past four years."

"So the police have no reason to track him." Aizawa said darkly.

"And they have no reason to help keep him away from Hawks." Mockingjay continued. "As far as their records say, Kaetsu hasn't done anything to warrant a restraining order."

Miruko tensed and crossed her arms, looking away from them. Hawks noticed the stiffness in her shoulders and a stone of dread settled in his chest. He had a bad feeling he knew what upset her. He had never told her about Kaetsu. Implied he had dealt with creeps in the past yes, but never *told* her one was a handler of his. She had every right to be upset with him.

He shifted from foot to foot and looked at the open street around them warily. "Should we be discussing this here?"

"No." Mockingjay acknowledged. "We can go to your office."

Hawks shot her a look. "Um. *Commission*?"

She flipped her braid over her shoulder. "Won't be able to hear or see a thing. They haven't since I started working there. If they try their best, all they'll get a cute little image of a bee to study."

Hawks's mouth moved wordlessly. He had no idea Katniss had done that. He knew she had a mysterious hacker friend— 'Beetee' or something— but he didn't know she'd had him do anything to keep the Commission out of his Agency. No wonder Ennea had been undiscovered.

A ghost of a smile curled at his lips. "Thanks, Katniss."

"Hmm."

Miruko turned away from them and headed to Aizawa's car without a word.

XXXXXXX

Hawks was rather relieved when he was released from UA's custody after his appointment— and a few hours spent insisting that he did not need to stay on the campus and would call Recovery Girl if something happened, thanks— and dropped off with Miruko. At first he thought Mockingjay would stick around and be overprotective— really, he was *fine*— but she left with suspiciously little fuss.

A quick scan of the area showed there were no less than four Heroes skulking about. Hawks couldn't tell who they were, but when he spotted one on the roof, they waved at him. He glumly waved back and followed Miruko inside.

Aizawa and Toshinori had promised to pick him up for his follow-up appointment on Tuesday. Recovery Girl would be busy, it seemed. Hawks had wanted to visit Eri before going home, but the two had politely rebuffed him. If he were more paranoid, he might think he had done something to scare her but he had the feeling they were trying to get her used to not seeing him every day. That still hurt, but not as badly.

At least he could sleep easier with the knowledge Overhaul could not get to her. He and his captured men were 'safe' in police custody, and unless the remaining Shie Hassaikai wanted to face the forces of Tartarus to rescue their captured comrades, they were staying there.

As Miruko went to bed without saying goodnight— and yes, that did worry Hawks but he was honestly too mentally and emotionally exhausted to deal with that right now—Green's frustration jabbed at him, too potent to be contained.

"I guess it was too much to hope that we'd stop the whole yakuza gang there."

*"If we had planned for an attack instead of sitting on our asses maybe we **would** have."* Orange snapped.

"That is not true." Silver interjected sternly. *"We could not have predicted the Shie Hassaikai would attack now. Eri was at a secure location and only a few people knew she'd be going to UA. There was no way for Overhaul to learn of the transfer unless..."* He trailed off.

"*Unless someone told him."* Green finished flatly.

*"Please tell me we aren't dealing with **another** traitor."* Yellow groaned.

Vague memories of the attack on USJ and the training camp flickered through Hawks's mind.

Wait.

What?!

There was a *traitor* now? Since when? Well, since before the USJ incident but this was still news to Hawks.

Traitor*? What traitor?!*

"There was one at UA in our past." Red shared. *"We never found out who it was. We can only assume they died when UA was attacked. The villains might have betrayed them."*

"*Or a Hero killed them for betraying us."* Purple said flatly.

"Or maybe they had a change of heart and wanted to atone?" Pink offered optimistically.

"When it was too late." Orange muttered.

Why didn't you tell me this sooner? Hawks demanded.

"Like Red said, we never found out who it was." Green explained. *"We spent most of our schooling unaware there* ***was*** *a traitor. We didn't even find out there was one until Aizawa told us after… after you were captured."*

Previously missing pieces fell into place. *The traitor found out other me was a spy for the Heroes from Pink and Yellow and told the Paranormal Liberation Front.*

Yellow clenched his teeth and his presence shrank, like he was trying to hide.

Pink similarly retreated.

"Probably." Purple said quietly. *"We can only guess."*

Why didn't you tell me sooner? Hawks demanded.

"*We didn't really think about it."* Green admitted. *"I mean, we weren't involved in the traitor hunt and by the time we found out one existed, it was too late. They never became a problem again so they must have died, as Red said."*

Hawks took a deep breath and dragged his hands down his face. *Guys? For future reference: Information like that is* ***kind of important!***

Green winced. *"Sorry. We honestly didn't think about it."*

Hawks *could* be a jerk and snap at him but he relented. *So you have no idea who the UA traitor is?*

"*We know some of the people they're not."* Red offered.

Tell me, Hawks ordered.

"*Aizawa, Nedzu, All Might, Number Thirteen, the Big Three, Tokoyami, Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu — yes, that is his real name— Tsunotori, Bakugo, Awase, Yaoyorozu, Kendo, Tsuburaba, and… well, the eight of us are innocent."* Purple listed. *"So past Midoriya, Iida, Uraraka,*

Todoroki, Shinso, and Kaminari are also clear." He braced himself against Red, Orange, and Silver's outrage. *"I'm sorry, but I'm **only** listing those we are absolutely, one hundred percent certain are not the traitor. Like Pink said, they could have had a change of heart or been coerced into working for the Villains. They could be a victim, but right now— in the present— they are our enemy. Present Mic theorized they were in Class 1-A or 1-B considering the camp attack."*

Hawks noted the names, which he could also theoretically and easily use to look up the Quirks that went with them.

"*Don't you dare."* Orange growled.

Hawks decided to continue to humor him. For now.

You didn't include Present Mic on your list of innocents, he noted.

"*He's the one who brought up the traitor in the first place."* Purple sighed.

"*He was turned into a Nomu."* Yellow hissed.

Purple was unrepentant. *"As were many others. Like I said, we're not leaving anyone out just because we like them."*

You really are Aizawa's apprentice, Hawks sighed. *We should warn him. Maybe get the ball rolling to stop the attack at the camp.*

"***If** there is one. We want to capture Shigaraki, remember?"*

"*But Shigaraki was not there at the camp."* Silver argued. *"His absence might not affect things."*

Hawks glanced at the calendar on the wall. The exams would start the week after his next appointment. And that Saturday would be the mall incident, if it happened. His stomach churned with anxiety but he pushed his worries about the future away. If he kept stressing out about it he'd give himself an ulcer.

He crept to Miruko's room and tapped on the door.

"Rumi? Is everything okay?"

At first there was no reply, and he thought she might already be asleep. Then a flat, terse voice came through the door.

"I'm fine. Just tired. Want to sleep."

Miruko did not sound tired. She sounded angry. And not in her normal loud, cuss-filled way. This anger was quieter, hot and simmering like a volcano about to erupt and fill the sky with ashes and flames.

Hawks nibbled on his lip. "Are you sure? You sou—"

"I *don't* want to talk." Miruko snapped. "Just *go away.*"

Hawks clamped his mouth shut and shifted onto his back foot, away from the door. He forced himself to drop the defensive stance and lowered his arms. His first paranoid thought was that she was becoming sick of him and his problems.

He shoved those self-centered thoughts away and tried to think of the situation more logically. She was probably exhausted after the events of the weekend. She'd been with him at UA, and then gone running to do Hero Work. Had she gotten any sleep? He decided it would be counterproductive to ask.

Hawks forced a smile even though she could not see him. "Okay. Um. I'm always willing to listen if you want to talk."

Miruko did not respond.

"...Good night." Hawks whispered.

Hawks retreated as quickly as he dared. He looked towards the couch but knew trying to sleep was a bad idea. Miruko wouldn't appreciate it if he woke up screaming again. So instead he went to the counter and turned on a light that was out of the way and hopefully would not bother Miruko. He shuffled quietly through the drawers and found a notebook and pen.

"*What are you doing?"* Green asked.

Now that we have Aizawa on our side, we might as well write stuff down and give it to him. It'll be easier than telling him everything and he can consult it if we're not around. Hawks took off the cap of the pen and twirled it between his fingers. *Does he have a code I can use to be safer?*

"*Yes."* Red said. *"Green and I shall teach it to you."*

The code was easy to learn, but Hawks suspected that was only because he had people with experience using it inside his head. He tried not to think about how their memories might be melding again and considered the empty first page of the notebook. Slowly, he wrote the 'title' for his compilation in the same code as its contents.

'*Hero Analysis for the Future No. 14'*

Despite the subject material he and the voices would have to share, a strange feeling of nostalgic calm came over Hawks and his grip on the pen relaxed. He spent the next hours writing the events that would shape and destroy the future.

Chapter End Notes

Names and meanings:

Norito (徳登) Kaetsu (カ悦)

徳 (nori) "benevolence, virtue, goodness, commanding respect"

登 (to) "ascend, climb up"

カ (Ka) "power" or "temporary"

悦 (etsu) "ecstasy, joy, rapture"

Together, Kaetsu can also mean "pleasure".

Atsushi (敦) Chida (津知多)

敦 (atsushi) "kindness, honesty"

知 (chi) "wisdom, intellect"

多 (da) "many"

(sources from Behind the Name)

A Rough Patch

It was just past midnight when Hawks received a text from Aizawa.

'We need to talk. Meet me at Fukuoka Tower.'

Hawks shoved down a bundle of nerves and sent a brief okay before getting dressed. He glanced at his notebook but decided it wasn't ready to be given to the other Hero yet and headed out the door with his feathers hidden in his clothes. He walked right below the Heroes responsible for watching over him.

Like he predicted, they expected him to take to the air if he snuck out. They should have known he would not be so predictable. Mockingjay would have a *fit* if she found out he left so easily. Which is why Hawks was conveniently not going to mention it to her.

Once he was a few blocks away he took to the air.

Chances he's changed his mind about my mental state?

"Low to none." Green reassured him.

"If anything, you're probably on his 'Protect Because They're a Dumbass' list." Yellow added. *"I too was a member of that elite club."*

Funny.

"Not joking~" Yellow sang.

Hawks landed on the building and immediately spotted Aizawa crouched near it's edge. He shoved his hands into his pockets.

"Nice view."

"I'm sure you have seen nicer." Aizawa said dismissively. He rose from his crouch and crossed his arms. "Eight time travelers are in your head. All *my* students."

Hawks wasn't sure if he meant it as a request for confirmation or what so he nodded.

Aizawa huffed and dropped his arms to his sides. "Problem children. All of you."

"Hey, don't group me with them." Hawks protested. "I'm a responsible adult!"

Aizawa gave him a *look*. His expression spasmed like he had thought of something unpleasant and he abruptly turned his head away. "Were they aware when the Commission had you?"

"No." Hawks reassured him quickly. "They locked themselves in and didn't feel anything."

"I see." Aizawa said softly. He removed his goggles from his eyes and left them dangling around his neck. "What's the plan?"

"I'll take over." Green said.

Hawks nodded and braced himself.

Aizawa's hand landed on his arm, stopping him. He'd like to pretend he did not tense up at the touch but it was hard to fool nine people, eight of whom were in his head. The Underground Hero's expression was unreadable.

"*You* can tell me." he stated.

Green could not fully stifle his disappointment.

Deciding not to question Aizawa, Hawks filled him in as much as he could about the biggest players they currently needed to focus on, mostly focusing on the League rather than the Meta Liberation Army.

"Our next step is to stop Shigaraki at the mall." He finished. "Once he's out of the way, we're trying to figure out how to raid the Nomu Factory without losing All Might or getting Heroes killed. The biggest problems right now are All For One and the Doctor— the creator of the Nomu. AFO is too strong for everyone except All Might, and Doctor Ujiko has a Nomu that'll let him teleport the League away if he wants. The voi—" Hawks realized calling them 'the voices' out loud was probably a bad idea. "My friends never found out where he hid. He has secret labs all over the world."

"So even if we raided the factory, there's no guarantee that we'd arrest them all." Aizawa murmured. "And if we lose them there, there's no telling where they'll show up next. Plus, if they realize we have information we shouldn't they'll start investigating… which could lead them to you."

Hearing it put into words was not comforting.

"…Yeah." Hawks said lamely.

Aizawa sighed and cracked his neck. "I'll look into it and get back to you." His sharp gaze met Hawks's and narrowed to slits. "It would be wisest not to share your 'friends' with anyone else. They will react badly."

The way he said it— as if hoping otherwise was foolishly naive to the point of idiocy— made Hawks's stomach sink. Was his word truly that worthless when it came to convincing others his story was real?

He covered a wince with a smile. "Yeah, yeah. Gotta keep it to myself, as always. I know I'm stupid but I'm not *that* stupid."

Aizawa's dark eyes scrutinized him with an intensity he immediately disliked. The Underground Hero abruptly turned and launched himself off the roof, swinging away.

Hawks watched him go and huffed. "Bye to you, too."

"Huh." Green said, his puzzlement brushing at Hawks. "*I thought sensei would want to speak with us."*

"He's probably still processing." Pink said.

"Maybe." Purple murmured, sounding distracted.

"Do you want to share your thoughts?" Red asked politely.

"No."

Yellow immediately began to pester him with much less politeness than Red.

That set off Silver, who scolded him for being nosy, which set off Orange, who scoffed at him for his 'predictably uptight' reaction.

The voices continued to bicker good-naturedly as Hawks took to the air.

Sneaking back into the apartment was disturbingly easy.

XXXXXXX

It was five in the morning when Aizawa went home after patrol. It had taken a while to travel back from Fukuoka but he found the extra trip was worth it. His thoughts buzzed with what Hawks had told him— and what he had seen— but he had to admit the full weight of what he'd learned had yet to hit him.

It was simply so… *fantastical*. Yes, this world had many amazing and strange Quirks that would not be out of place in science fiction stories, but *time travel*? The fight had been lost so badly in the future that Heroes— his students— had to rely on *time travel* to fix it? If he were being completely honest with himself, Aizawa was still not sure he *did* fully believe it. But he would try to, because if it was his students in there— troubled and scared and alone and desperate for help— he had to. For them and for Hawks.

Aizawa tried to picture a world where Izuku Midoriya realized he could not save it and his imagination failed him. That kid was the type of Hero to keep fighting until his body was literally past breaking, and yet this future had successfully broken that seemingly indomitable belief he could save everyone. Perhaps that was why Aizawa was not ready to speak with 'Green' just yet.

Though it may also be Hawks's rather concerning willingness to give up his body when he clearly did not want to. Unbidden, All Might's words echoed in Aizawa's mind.

"*He keeps insisting that I do not have the full story and they had 'good reasons' to possess him and use his body for themselves. He would not tell me what they made him do. I'm not sure he himself knows. And he seems convinced he cannot leave them… I fear I will answer the phone one day and he'll tell me they betrayed his trust and possessed him again, or worse."*

It had been *them*. Hawks's 'voices'. Aizawa's future time traveling students. *They* were the ones who took control of Hawks's body while he was asleep or drifting. *They* were the ones that had broken Hawks's trust, but who Hawks had so easily forgiven because they were good people.

They had taken control of Hawks like he was an empty puppet they could manipulate, all while he was unaware.

For 'good reasons'.

Aizawa was a common practitioner who toed the different grey shades of morality, but to hear his students had traversed into those waters and done such a thing? He did not know what to feel about that.

So no, he was not quite ready to speak with his time traveling students.

Time travel.

Damn it all.

Aizawa entered his new apartment to find Present Mic on the couch, snoring away. There were ribbons in his hair and glitter smudged across his nose.

Aizawa peeked into Eri's room to find the girl was fast asleep, her new Hawks plushie clutched safely in her arms. The toy and her were glitter free but he could see it had a gold bow clipped to its hair. Aizawa's lips quirked and he quietly backed out of the room, content that Eri was alright for tonight.

His phone vibrated and he saw it was a message from Nedzu asking for him to come to his office. Aizawa resigned himself to a night without sleep and exited his apartment mere minutes after he returned, heading to the Principal's office.

Nedzu was sitting at his desk with a steaming cup of coffee placed in front of the empty chair. Aizawa sat down and took a long drink. He lowered the half-empty mug.

"Thank you."

Nedzu chuckled. "I had a feeling you would need the caffeine. I prefer tea myself but can make an adequate cup of coffee in a pinch."

Aizawa hummed in agreement and sipped his coffee, extending its consumption as much as he could.

Nedzu folded his paws and laid them on the desk, ears twitching. "As for why I called you here at this time of the—" His beady black eyes flicked to the clock. "—morning, I would simply like to discuss our recent guest."

Aizawa lowered the mug again, setting on the desk in front of him. "Hawks?"

Nedzu blinked. "Ah, yes. I do mean him. In hindsight, I suppose I could have been speaking of young Eri."

"What would you like to know?" Aizawa asked, trying not to hedge.

Nedzu would notice if he was evasive. This was a conversation Aizawa could not say he dreaded facing but one he wished he had more time to process things before having. He was more than a little suspicious that Nedzu may already know more than he was letting on and was simply seeing what Aizawa would tell him.

Nedzu appeared calm, but Aizawa recognized the steely, calculating glint in his eyes. "Hawks told you some truths, did he not?"

"You don't know?" Aizawa asked, surprised. "I thought you'd be listening in."

Nedzu's nose twitched. "No. I do not have cameras or listening devices in Recovery Girl's office."

Aizawa had a feeling it was because she insisted more than him respecting patient confidentiality.

Nedzu cocked his head to the side in a questioning manner. "Well?"

Aizawa met the Principal's gaze. "Yes. Hawks told me what was going on, or at least as much as he knows. His… unexpected Quirk outburst was a surprise to him."

"Is he a Nomu?" Nedzu asked, tone unnervingly neutral.

"No." Aizawa said instantly.

"Is he a sleeper agent?"

"No."

"Will he harm those within this school?"

"Never." Aizawa said with certainty.

Even without his students' future selves in Hawks's head, he knew the younger Hero would rather lose a limb than let a kid be harmed. In fact, Aizawa worried more about Hawks refusing to fight back if someone attacked him than the other way around.

The steel slipped from Nedzu's gaze and he nodded absently. "I will not demand you tell me what he told you. If you thought I needed to know, you would have already spoken. I trust your judgment, Shota."

Aizawa thought as much, though it was a bit flattering to have that confirmed. "Does his… Quirk problems change anything about our timetable?"

"I'm afraid not." Nedzu admitted. "If we had an open position we needed to fill, it would be simple to bring Hawks onto our staff. However, since we intend to create a teaching assistant position for him, we should wait until a new term— or at least the training camp— in order to accept his 'application'. If we attempt to bring him into UA now, the Commission will be suspicious and may take measures to ensure we cannot employ him at all."

Aizawa knew he was right. If the Commission suspected UA was giving Hawks a way out of his cage, they would chain him and take him away where the other Heroes could not reach him. Or— if they wanted to be petty when reminding UA who had more power outside of the campus— they may make some arbitrary law where a Hero had to be thirty or older in order to work at UA. Aizawa would not put it past them.

When they accepted Hawks's application to UA— he had said he would like to teach again and that was a good enough 'application' for Aizawa and Nedzu— the UA teachers and staff had to bring him in quickly enough that the Commission would not be able to remove him without causing a public fuss.

Politics and dealing with the public were two of Aizawa's least favorite parts of Hero work, but he knew how to play this game. They just had to make sure they did not lose Hawks due to a reckless move on their end.

"Of course." was all Aizawa said. "Is there anything else?"

"Not at the moment, no." Nedzu said. "However, you should try to get some sleep before your day starts. And maybe shower."

His black eyes twinkled with mirth. Aizawa grumbled lowly— neither refusing or accepting his advice— and rose from his seat. He took the cooling mug of coffee with him. Nedzu had plenty of mugs laying around. He could afford to let Aizawa borrow one.

XXXXXXX

Hanging out at Fukuoka's bars was something Twice found himself doing a lot more lately. It wasn't like he was stressed or depressed or anything— not any more than usual— but the old thoughts were coming back. The ever-elusive Shigaraki was withdrawing more than usual lately, and Twice could tell he had something on his mind. He almost wished it was a plan, simply for something to do other than wallow in his own lack of acceptable social skills.

Twice did not know why, but there was this… disconnect he felt with the other League members. It was probably 'getting to know you' jitters, but he could not help but wonder if it was more than that. Hearing Shigaraki's visceral hatred of Heroes was normal, but a part of Twice could not bear to hear it because he knew that just like all Villains weren't chaos-driven types, he knew not all Heroes deserved to be turned to dust.

At least Hawks was back, and seemingly none the worse for wear this time. He looked exhausted but there were no weird bruises or burns as far as Twice could tell.

…Okay, Twice was *seriously* starting to wonder if he had developed a Hawks-obsession because yeah, he was thinking about his possibly fellow split personality-

holder *waayyyyyy* too much in his free time.

And also still acting like a not-stalker in his free time.

Damn it, that was a bad look even for a Villain because *nope*, that was not the kind of Villain Twice wanted to be. He wanted to be himself, not a stalker-ing creep. At least he was not as obsessed as Toga, who wanted nothing more than to get some of Hawks's blood so she could become who Stain adored.

Twice slouched over his half-empty drink and eyed it miserably. *Argh, why do I have to overthink **this** of all things!*

Because it's socially unacceptable to walk up to someone and go 'Hey, I know you have a split personality like me. Want to bond?' I fear that he'll reject me like so many others.

He gritted his teeth. *That's right. I shouldn't even bother with trying to befriend a Hero. I shouldn't expect the entire League to become friends in a couple weeks. Friendships take time and I probably missed my chance with Hawks.*

Twice took a gulp of his drink and sighed. The chair next to him creaked and he glanced to the left, acknowledging the woman who sat beside him. She had a rather severe and solemn look to her, accentuated by her neat brown braid and sharp grey eyes. That seriousness was not hindered by the casual clothes she wore, with the most standout part of her outfit being the gloves covering her hands. Did she have a touch-based Quirk or something?

"Hey." she said briefly. "I hope you don't mind that I sit here."

"Not at all." Twice mumbled. He hoped she did not feel too chatty. He didn't feel like talking much himself.

The woman must have already ordered a drink because she did not wave the bartender down. Instead she leaned forward and propped her chin on her hand. "Come here often?"

So she did want to chat. Damn it.

"Over the past few weeks, yeah." Twice muttered vaguely, taking a drink. "Just… seeing the sights."

"I've noticed you around town." the woman noted. She leaned towards him conspiratorially. "You don't have to hide it. You came here to see Hawks, right? A lot of people do."

Her tone was teasing in a slightly stilted, socially awkward way that suggested she was unused to talking to strangers. Apparently Twice looked so miserable than an anti-social person thought he needed to talk to somebody. Strangely enough, that discomfort actually put Twice at ease.

He cleared his throat. "Well… maybe?"

The woman did not seem bemused by his tourism habits. Instead she looked rather bored as her grey eyes drifted along the bottles of alcohol behind the bar. "I noticed you watching him

fly by on patrol sometimes. Are you a fan?"

Twice chuckled awkwardly. "Kinda. I… uh… well…" His shoulders slumped and he sighed. "Aw, to hell with it. I met him once and thought we could be friends but I didn't try to ask him. So naturally I'm dithering while trying to figure out how to become friends when it's probably too late." He wrinkled his nose. "That sounds horribly romance-like. Ugh, no." He scoffed. "Romance is soooo overrated. Friendship is the best!" Twice twitched and avoided looking at the woman, hoping she pinned his mood swing on being drunk. "Shit, that was corny."

The woman did not appear scornful. She did not look particularly amused either. Twice got the feeling she tended not to show her thoughts on her face.

She inclined her head in an almost regal manner. "I see. Just checking. I'm not an expert at making friends but you should try to approach Hawks. Just go up and say 'hi'. He could use more people like you on his side."

Twice had to snort at that. He lowered his head, focusing on his drink. "People like me, huh? He needs a strange man in his thirties who looks at someone and goes 'potential friend!' while struggling to make friends?"

The woman did not laugh with— or at— him. "He needs people who are honest and don't want to use him for something. You're a good man, even if your record tries to claim otherwise. You seem like a guy who's merely fallen into something they'll regret. So if you'd heed some advice from a stranger: Get out of the League while you can, Jin Bubaigawara."

Twice's head snapped up, but the grey-eyed woman was already gone.

XXXXXXX

Miruko still was not talking to Hawks.

As Monday passed and the day of his follow-up appointment arrived, she did not offer to take him there. In fact, she did not speak to him at all. She left the apartment before he woke and ate in her room if she was home when he was, taking what might be a bottle of alcohol with her whenever he happened to spot her in the kitchen. Hawks had no idea what he had done wrong.

"*Maybe she just wants some time and space to herself?"* Pink offered as a rather optimistic explanation.

"*But why?"* Green countered. *"She was perfectly fine when we woke up at UA. She was worried, in fact. Remember?"*

"*Vaguely."* Silver said, summarizing their hazy recollection of their return to consciousness in a word.

"*Something must have happened."* Green stated.

"*Or she's sick of us."* Orange growled.

"***Orange***—"

"*Don't 'Orange' me. We're all thinking it. She might have realized how screwed up our brain is and decided we're not worth her time—"*

No. Hawks shook his head vehemently. *Rumi wouldn't act like this because of… that stuff.*

"*Are you sure?"* It was Purple who uttered the challenging question. *"You know how people can react to this kind of thing. It's similar to how they react to 'villainous' Quirks. They act fine and accepting at first, but when they realize the 'issues' aren't going away and they'll be stuck caring for someone, they abandon ship. It's part of the reason why Twice became so loyal to the League. He wanted acceptance and could only find it there."*

Rumi wouldn't 'abandon ship', Hawks insisted. *Something else is wrong.*

Most of the voices believed him but Orange, Purple, and even Silver were skeptical. It was Silver's disbelief that hit the hardest, and Hawks wondered if there was something obvious he was missing. His phone rang and he glanced at it, answering upon seeing Aizawa's number.

"Hey."

"*Hello, Hawks."* Aizawa sounded exhausted. Before Hawks could worry, he continued speaking. *"Is Miruko still with you?"*

Hawks withheld a wince. "She had a mission so she left early. I'm by myself. Well, myself and those Heroes outside that I *totally* did not notice."

Aizawa did not acknowledge his sarcasm. Rude. *"Dammit."* He breathed. *"I was hoping she'd be there. I'm afraid I can't bring you to your appointment. Eri might have another outburst."*

Hawks gripped his phone, careful not to break it. "Stay with her. I can get to the office myself."

"*No."* Aizawa said quickly. *"Toshinori is still available. He will drive you."*

Hawks repressed a sigh. "Look, he doesn't have to take time off from work just for me. I know Kae—" He glanced apprehensively at the bug-filled walls of the apartment even though it was probably too late to hide anything. "—*he* is out there, but I can handle myself."

"*That's not it."* Aizawa said. *"You're going over your results today. You shouldn't have to be alone."*

Based on the voices' discontent, Hawks knew arguing would get him nowhere so he relented. "Okay."

He picked up the notebook he had spent much of the night filling out. He and the voices had only gotten as far as the first part of the League's attack at the summer camp since it turned out eight people had a lot to say on different events, both important and minor but could become important. He'd rather give unnecessary details than accidentally leave something important out.

"Listen, I have the first part of the… report we talked about done. When can I drop it off?"

Thankfully, Aizawa understood the underlying message. *"I'll pick it up tonight."*

"Great. See you then." Hawks hung up.

He glanced down at the notebook and shoved it into his bag with his costume. He'd rather not leave it laying in the apartment. It wasn't safe here.

Toshinori pulled up a few minutes later. Hawks got into the passenger's seat and placed his bag on his lap as he shut the door.

"Hi. Thanks for driving me."

"You're welcome." Toshinori said cheerfully.

He looked oddly pleased as he pulled away from the apartment, like a kid who had gotten a box of their favorite sweet.

"What has you so happy?" Hawks asked.

Toshinori almost looked embarrassed, his gaunt cheeks turning pink. "Would you believe me if I said I do not drive much? And certainly not with a friend. It's a rather peaceful experience."

Hawks wished he had his collar to hide in. How could this man be so genuine?
Freaking *teddy bear*. Still, his statement brought up a lot of questions but many were too personal for Hawks to want to prod for answers at the moment.

"Guess you haven't faced much road rage on your trips then. So how do you get to work?" he asked curiously.

"I walk, mostly."

Hawks's lips twitched. "That can't be good for your punctuality. I bet you stop and pet every animal you see along the way."

"Perhaps."

"And you're the guy that brings every stray you find to a shelter."

"Maybe."

"*And* you save cats from trees."

He laughed. "Guilty as charged."

The rest of the drive was quiet. Hawks did not realize he didn't feel like talking until they pulled up to the office with barely another word passing between them. He must have gotten

car sick because he was feeling a little queasy as he got out. There was not enough time for him to walk it off before they reached the receptionist's desk. In fact, he felt worse.

Unlike the last time, he was not immediately seen by the doctor though he was put in a private room. That helped ease Hawks's worries a bit because the last thing he needed was his presence here being leaked onto social media. The internet would have a field day and half of Japan would be convinced he was secretly dying by lunch.

Hawks sat on the patient's table while Toshinori took a chair by the door. He ignored the large white screen on the wall, which was currently blank. While he waited, he was asked to fill out another form. As he considered some of the questions, he wondered if he should lie about some of the answers because many of them felt oddly specific. And many of the answers to those specific questions were 'Yes'.

Was Chida stalking him or something? Did he have a mind-reading Quirk?

"*I think these are standard questions."* Green reassured him. *"You should probably be honest."*

"*You should **definitely** be honest."* Silver corrected indignantly. *"This is about your health."*

Hawks gave in. *Fine.*

He'd barely finished the questionnaire— some of the questions were difficult and personal, okay?— before the someone knocked on the door. Doctor Chida came in and greeted Hawks with a smile.

"Hello, Hawks." He glanced at Toshinori and inclined his head. "And Toshinori. It's good to see you again."

"No offense, Doctor, but it's nicer to see you when I am not a patient." Toshinori said.

Chida chuckled good-naturedly. "You are not the first person to say that to me. Now then..." He turned to Hawks. "Did you complete that paperwork?"

Hawks nodded and reluctantly held out the form. Chida took the questionnaire from him and attached it to his clipboard before skimming it. None of his thoughts showed on his face, but Hawks knew he was being judged.

He was such an *idiot*. What had he been *thinking*, answering yes to some of those questions? He should have known better. He should have lied, or at least bluffed his way through it like he did with the Commission. Chida was probably probing for signs of weakness like the Commission did whenever they had him fill out 'psych exams'. Why else would Chida care whether Hawks had trouble sleeping, flashbacks, and nightmares?

Maybe I can play it off as a mistake. I read the questions wrong and marked the wrong spots. Or I was joking. I'm the joking type after all. I never take things seriously—

"*Gold, Chida isn't a Commission doctor."* Green interrupted. *"He wants to help you."*

What's your proof? Hawks demanded. *You didn't know this doctor before Sunday.*

Green remained firm. *"My 'proof' is that Recovery Girl trusts him, and he helped A— ah, Toshinori. You trust Toshinori, right? Do you think he would go to a man with ulterior motives?"*

Hawks had to begrudgingly acknowledge he was right. He crossed his arms and bounced his leg, keeping his fingers away from his feathers. Chida asked him a few more questions and he curtly answered, giving no more information than necessary. Toshinori kept glancing at him with a worried look on his face and it was *really* getting under Hawks's skin.

Finally, Chida moved on, flipping a page on his clipboard. "Your results are right here. Let's go over them, shall we?"

Hawks held his breath.

Chida tapped his pen on the form in front of him. "Good news, there are no malignant tumors. You also do not have meningitis, which is often what causes seizures."

Those possibilities had not even crossed Hawks's mind. "Oh." he said lamely. "That's… good?"

"Indeed." Chida said pleasantly.

Hawks abruptly noticed he was not smiling. He didn't look *grave*, but he appeared rather solemn. The doctor reached up and tapped the screen on the wall. Two images of a brain appeared. The one on the left was colored, while the one on the right was mostly grey.

"These images are standard brain scans for an adult male around your age, accounting for your Quirk and how it affects your psychology and physiology. These—" His finger pointed at white spots on the right image. "—are brain lesions. In the case of this brain, they are minor and benign." He touched the screen and two more scans appeared above the first two. "This is your brain."

Hawks stared. He knew it was the point of an MRI to show what was going on in his head, but he did not think the difference would be so noticeable. On the colored images, the colors were brighter, bigger, and in the wrong places. On the black and white scan, he could see far too many white spots.

"Your scan shows dysfunction in the amygdala, hippocampus, and Brocas area of your brain." Chida said. "The amygdala is an integrative center for emotions, emotional behavior, and motivation. The hippocampus has a role in memories, and is responsible for converting short term memories into long term ones. The Brocas area is responsible for speech and language production. People who have damage to this area can understand words but sometimes have trouble speaking them."

"I'm fine." Hawks blurted. "I can speak *fine*. Most of the time." His gaze locked onto the upper images and his fingers wrapped around the edge of his seat. It was too soft to bite into his palms. "I— This— This can't be mine. Has there been a mix up?"

Chida looked at him with such empathy that even Hawks could not mistake it for pity. "No, Hawks. This is *your* brain." He pointed at some of the blotches on the grey image. "None of the lesions are malignant, but their presence is concerning. Have you suffered any blows to the head as of late?"

"I don't think so." Hawks said. His voice was distant again and there was static in his ears. "Nothing that bad, anyway. But I've been having headaches…"

"You indicated that in the form." Chida acknowledged. "Do you feel they are headaches or migraines?"

Hawks opened his mouth and recalled Silver's words. It hit him then that he would not be the only one affected if the doctors got things horribly wrong. The voices were *in his head*. If Chida prescribed some type of medication, what might it do to them? Giving false information about his pain could end up hurting them.

"I think they're migraines." he admitted. "I've been taking aspirin. It helps. Sometimes."

His gaze was drawn back to the scans but he forced it away.

Chida noticed. He reached out and gently put his hand on Hawks's. Hawks stiffened at the contact but did not pull his hand away.

"We do not have the scans to compare your brain to itself from the past, but I can assure you many of these changes are rather recent. If I were to hazard a guess, I'd say within the last year."

Hawks could only stare. The situation was almost so bad it was *funny*. He was looking at a picture of his brain, a brain which seemed unable to process what it was hearing about itself. How freaking *hilarious*.

"*We did this."*

It took Hawks a moment to realize it was Green that spoke, his horror stabbing through him like a spear through the gut. The walls inside his head cracked and held but their guilt shattered the windows, swamping him. His throat closed up and his breathing grew harsher as his vision went grey. Someone was crying and he hoped it wasn't him because the walls were still *cracking* and a kaleidoscope of colors invaded the grey, mixing together and turning it all into a murky black.

Someone was holding him but they weren't restraining him. He could move his arms— still had two— and his wings— still there, not cut off— and when he struggled, the person released him, unlike the many Nomu they— *he* had fought.

No, that *wasn't right*. He had only fought that one Nomu at Hosu, and it did not grab him. Right? Right, of course he was right he had to be right he knew himself he knew his memories he was *him* and him alone—

The voices forcibly pulled themselves back into their 'room' and slammed the doors shut. The windows were still broken though, and Hawks could still feel their guilt because *what had they done?* He should reassure them it wasn't their fault— they did not ask to be shoved into his brain— but he had more pressing matters to deal with in the outside world when he blinked and was able to take in his surroundings once more.

Chida was still there. Hawks was surprised the doctor had not sedated him. It's what the ones at the Commission would have done. Based on Toshinori's position near the patient's table, it was obvious he had been the one holding him. There was a forming bruise on his arm. Had Hawks done that?

"I'm sorry." Hawks's voice cracked. He hadn't meant for it to. It just did.

Toshinori's expression softened further and Hawks was horrified to realize he— Hawks— must be fishing for sympathy in order to escape punishment again. He used to do it all the time according to his handlers, who'd made sure to set him straight because 'acting pathetic' would not stop Villains from hurting him so it wouldn't stop his handlers either. He'd be having a lesson with Amplifier or stuck in remedial courses if his handlers found out he acted like this.

He realized the Commission *was* going to find out about this visit and struggled to keep his expression neutral.

"You do not need to apologize." Chida soothed him, and Hawks felt another wave of guilt. Couldn't the doctor tell he was being manipulated? "You are not alone in this, Hawks. Twenty out of every one hundred Heroes develop some type of PTSD."

Hawks found he had lost his ability to speak.

Chida's voice remained gentle. "There are many symptoms for PTSD. Among them are a history or exposure to trauma, flashbacks, nightmares, and intrusive memories, avoiding reminders of that trauma, over-vigilance, trouble sleeping, easily being startled, negative thoughts or feelings, and significant distress or dysfunction."

Hawks *knew* that questionnaire had been a trap. Shock transformed into anger and he glared down at his clenched fists, struggling to keep up his poker face. Yes, Chida was wrong but Hawks had learned to smile no matter how upset he was. He tried to remind himself of that as each spoken word hit deeper and deeper, stinging him like a thousand tiny cuts.

"We do not use these scans to diagnose someone with PTSD." Chida continued obliviously. "However, we do take them into account when it comes to a PTSD diagnosis—"

Hearing that word again, something snapped.

"I *don't have PTSD!*" Hawks exploded. "Or anxiety, or— or *anything!* Half of the flashbacks aren't even my past. They're not my memories. They shouldn't affect me. My brai— *I'm* just overreacting about *stupid shit* that has nothing to do with me."

Chida did not recoil of frown at Hawks for his outburst. Instead he continued looking at him with those stupidly knowing eyes. Well, he *didn't* know. He didn't know *anything*.

"You are *not* experiencing this because of some type of personal failure." Chida stated.

Hawks's wings went rigid, his feathers fluffing up.

"Some find it comforting to see physical evidence of what's going on with their head." Chida continued, looking him right in the eye. "To them, it can be reassurance that they are not 'making it up', or 'overreacting'. There is a biological change in their brain that can cause symptoms and be seen and verified. To some, it shows that their PTSD is *not their fault*."

He was *lying*. Hawks knew that to be a fact. Hawks was a Hero who did not need to be coddled, and others had gone through worse and not gotten PTSD, yet here Hawks was, acting like a drama queen over trivial things and memories that weren't his.

"Yes it *is* my fault." he snapped even as part of his mind berated himself for acting so rude and ungrateful. Chida had taken time out of his day to see Hawks, yet Hawks was throwing a tantrum like an ungrateful brat *again*— "I'm supposed to be *better* than this. I'm like this because I did something *wrong*."

Chida raised an eyebrow at him. "I did not know that your Quirk allowed you to control the delicate functions of your brain and how it's wired."

Hawks faltered, caught off guard. "That has nothing to do with this."

"It does have something to do with this." Chida countered calmly. He nodded at the scans. "Again, these are *your* scans of *your* brain, displaying changes that affect you and your behavior." He kept meeting Hawks's gaze until the Hero looked away. "My recommendation is that you begin visiting a therapist." He continued, rubbing salt in the wound. "If you experience more seizures, come in immediately and we will do more testing."

Hawks glanced back at the scans and forced his sight away. The doctor seemed convinced he was right, and Hawks did not feel like fighting him over it. He did not feel like fighting about a lot of things lately. So he remained silent. He knew how this type of thing worked. It did not matter what Hawks said. Chida fully believed a lie and nothing Hawks claimed would sway him.

Hawks was sent home with a *stupid* pamphlet about PTSD and a *stupid* list of therapists' numbers. He tried to throw them in the trash but Toshinori caught them and put them on the counter.

"You should look over these." he said.

Hawks resisted the urge to snatch them off the countertop and burn them using White's Quirk. Or more likely blow them up them using Orange's, since the explosive voice was as eager as him to see them gone.

"I don't need them." he snapped. "The doctor's *wrong*. I don't have PTSD. It's a misdiagnosis."

Toshinori carefully but unsubtly moved the papers out of his reach, seemingly oblivious to Hawks's glower. "In some cases you're supposed to go to multiple doctors to be accurately diagnosed. You have two confirmations. *Three*, if Recovery Girl agrees."

"They're *all* wrong." Hawks growled. He set his bag down and opened it, revealing his costume. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get to work. I'm already late."

Toshinori looked down at him, appearing almost sad. Then he set his jaw. "*No*. You are taking the day off." He reached out and took the bag from Hawks's grasp, closing it.

Hawks gaped at him. "...What?" Surprise morphed into anger. "I'm not going to sit around all day."

"Yes, you are." Toshinori stated. "You're upset. You're angry. And I bet you didn't even notice you drifted on the way back from your appointment."

Hawks had not. Neither had the voices. Anger and panic warred for dominance, leaving his spine rigid and his winged flared defensively. "It will not affect my performance at—"

Toshinori hugged him.

Hawks froze, wings going stiff. Toshinori did not release him and he felt his breathing slow as his body realized he wasn't being attacked. Hawks remembered the doctor's stupid list of 'symptoms' and gritted his teeth, tensing up all over again.

"How about we just watch a movie?" Toshinori soothed. "Please?"

Hawks could hear the sorrowful undertone in his voice, as if Toshinori had recently gotten bad news. He went over the day's events but could not think of a time when Toshinori had left to take a call or anything. So what happened to make him so upset? Hawks did not ask. It would be hypocritical of him if he did.

So Hawks relented. Again. "Fine."

They watched a movie about a group of baby animals— adorable bunny, kitten, and puppy included— trying to find their lost friend and return home. He'd enjoy it more if he did not know Toshinori was trying to calm him down out of a misguided attempt to 'help' him.

Hawks kept glancing away from the screen to where the stupid pamphlet and numbers were. The smiling people on the cover mocked him and the desire to throw a few feathers at it was difficult to resist.

"This is stupid." Orange stated.

Hawks agreed.

His only consolation was that they hadn't stuck him with a schizophrenia misdiagnosis as well.

XXXXXXX

Night time was always an interesting period for one Fumikage Tokoyami. Darkness was his ally, but it was Dark Shadow's even more so, leaving his Quirk writhing and restless in the blackness. Children often used nightlights to keep monsters at bay, and Tokoyami would keep it secret to his dying breath that he was forced to do the same for more literal demons.

Not that Dark Shadow was a demon. He was a part of Tokoyami as much as his arm or bird head… if his arm or head decided to act on its own and rampage in the dark, of course.

As he lay in the glow of the purple and black crystal that illuminated the room with the softest light— for it had been the most dignified of his options— Tokoyami found his mind wandering, as if often did. Dark Shadow shifted restlessly, wanting to move in the darkness they both thrived in, but now was the time to sleep. Dark Shadow refused to accept that and rummaged around, making a nuisance of himself.

Tokoyami would be more annoyed if he did not know why. Loathe as he was to admit it, he was… concerned about his upcoming exams. Tests were nothing compared to the trials of real-life heroism— as the Nomu attack in Hosu clearly showed— but he acknowledged the anxiety that curled in his gut as the week of the exams drew ever-closer. Failure would not be the end of his career as a Hero, but it would be more than a little humiliating. Plus, if he failed, it would mean letting both himself, Aizawa-sensei, and Hawks-sensei down.

Tokoyami rolled onto his side as Dark Shadow whined and shoved his belongings around in agitation. As eleven o'clock became midnight, he gave up on sleep and sat up, sighing. Dark Shadow clung to his shoulder and zipped around, scarcely avoiding the bedside lamp.

"Be quiet, would you?" Tokoyami sighed. "The exams are nothing to worry about."

Dark Shadow stared at him in utter disbelief at his lie.

Tokoyami gave up on sleep and sat up, picking up his phone. He had no chat messages— unsurprising considering the hour— but he scrolled through previous conversations with his classmates, many of which were begging Yaoyorozu to help them study. His desire to study alone had been too much for him to want to join them, but now he wondered if he should have.

If he knew about his student's isolation, Hawks would probably have picked him up and dropped him right into Yaoyorozu's oversized yard while cheerfully encouraging him to make friends.

Tokoyami glanced at the time again and hesitantly moved his phone's screen to Hawks-sensei's number. He did not want to bother Hawks with his little problems. But Hawks *had* offered an open ear, and if anyone understood the stresses of Hero schooling, it should be him. He had only been out of high school for four years. Maybe he would have some advice.

What school did Hawks go to? It wasn't UA. I'll have to ask Midoriya later.

Tokoyami pressed call.

The line rang a few times, then clicked.

"*Hi, fledgling!"* a cheerful voice chirped.

Tokoyami twitched. "Please don't call me that."

"*But I **must** simply because you **adore** that nickname soooooooo much!"* Hawks said with far too much energy for this time of night. Tokoyami swore he heard him mutter *'Ohhhh. So that's why Rumi does it. Huh.'* before he raised his voice again. *"You gave me the idea yourself, after all."*

"I regret it every day." Tokoyami said darkly. A thought struck him and he winced. "Er, I hope you weren't asleep when I called."

"*Nah, I was awake."* Hawks said cheerfully. *"Usually am. I was out flying as a matter of fact… and certain people don't know about it."* He coughed. *"What's keeping you up?"*

"My thoughts are circling and I cannot rest." Tokoyami admitted.

"*Ooo, I know how that feels."* Hawks murmured sympathetically. *"I have a… well, someone I trust to talk to when I've got circling thoughts. So you wanna throw them at me or talk about unimportant stuff as a distraction?"*

Tokoyami hesitated briefly. "I am willing to share my thoughts."

"*Go ahead."*

Hawks spoke with his usual cheer, but Tokoyami could recognize the soothing, nudging tone he liked to use when trying to get people to open up. Despite himself, he found himself relaxing at its familiarity.

"I am worried about my upcoming exams." Tokoyami admitted. "I am fourteenth out of twenty when it comes to grades. I have studied and trained as much as I could but failure is a possibility I see on the horizon. I..." His shoulders slumped. "I fear I may be sent to remedial courses."

He heard Hawks inhale sharply. For a moment, his mentor did not speak, and all Tokoyami could hear was sharp breathing. Confusion quickly turned into alarm as his teacher continued to not answer. Was he having another panic attack?

"Hawks—?"

"What do you need?" Hawks interrupted sharply, sounding as if he could not pull enough air into his lungs.

Tokoyami paused. "Excuse me?"

"*What do you need to get out?"* Hawks demanded, voice going hard like he was giving an order. *"Are you home? Is your family with you? How many people are in your family? Are you being observed? Do you—"* He abruptly went silent and took a shuddering breath. *"Huh? Oh. **Oh**. It wasn't— **Shit**. Er, don't repeat… Aw to hell with it you've heard worse curses."* He cleared his throat. "*Sorry for freaking out on you, Tokoyami. What you said… Uh, at the Commission that means… something else."*

Tokoyami slowly put the pieces together and realized he had accidentally given Hawks some type of Commission distress code. While it was heartwarming that his sensei would instantly come to his aid, the mortification that he'd caused the man to believe he was in danger made his cheeks burn.

"I respectfully apologize, Hawks-sensei." he said solemnly, glad his teacher was not present to see his embarrassment. "It was not my intention to give you a distress code."

"*That's not just any distress code."* Hawks said, and Tokoyami realized his voice was *shaking*. *"It means an agent is being taken in for reconditioning—"* He paused with a curse. *"I shouldn't have told you that."*

The blood had already drained from Tokoyami's face, leaving him lightheaded. "They— Wha —*Reconditioning*?"

"*Yes."* Hawks said tersely. *"There are some dark things in the Hero world, Tsukoyomi. Don't worry about them yet, but… well, I guess you're aware of them now."* He took another breath. *"So is there anything specific I can help you understand for your exams?"*

Tokoyami could not understand how he could just drop the subject like that. His mind— once tired and unfocused— worked rapidly as it tried to fit Hawks's revelation with the image of Hero Society he wanted to protect.

"They *recondition* Heroes?"

To his credit, Hawks did not try to lie to him. *"Yes. Tokoyami, you need to drop it."* His voice was sharp but shaky, like *that day* during training.

Dark Shadow clung to Tokoyami like a frightened child. But he was *not* a child. He was a Hero in training. He could handle this completely unexpected development.

"Sensei—" He began, but remembered Hawks asking if he was being observed. He forced himself not to ask the question he so desperately did and *did not* want to. "...I apologize for pushing the subject. I realize it is not my place."

"*No, it's fine. It's my fault."* Hawks mumbled, and now Tokoyami could not deny there was blatant exhaustion in his voice. *"Just be careful who you mention that to, kid. Things could get ugly fast."*

The question Tokoyami dare not ask rose up but he forced himself not to voice it. 'Did the Commission try to recondition *you*? Are *they* why you went missing?' "Of course, Sensei. I

will be discreet." He looked around and found an excuse in Dark Shadow. "Dark Shadow is making a mess again so I must cut this short."

"*Of course."* Hawks did not sound relieved, but Tokoyami would bet money he was. *"Get some rest. As I can say from personal experience, you can't rely on coffee to function."*

"Good night." Tokoyami said cordially and hung up.

He lay back down as Dark Shadow clung to his arm, no longer roaming around the room. Rather than annoy him, Dark Shadow's presence was now a comfort, a stable presence he needed as his mind whirled with more thoughts than ever before.

It seemed there were more real monsters in the world than he thought.

But what could *he* do about it?

Dead Hero Walking

What have I done what have I done what have I done what have I done what have I done what have I done what have I done what have I done what have I done ***what have I—?***

"*Gold!"* Green shouted, pulling Hawks out of his spiral of terror. *"Calm down. Tokoyami will be fine."*

That had to be the biggest lie Hawks had ever been told. *I told him a Commission code! An unofficial one but still. And I told him about the* ***reconditioning oh my God—***

"*It is not your fault you instinctively reacted to that phrase."* Silver soothed him. *"You genuinely thought he was in danger."*

But I didn't have to let slip about the reconditioning, Hawks snapped. *He's a* ***student****, not a Pro Hero.*

"*He was a Pro Hero in our time…"* Red whispered, almost to herself. *"That is what we remember him as."*

Hawks barely noticed. *If he starts looking around the Commission* ***will*** *notice and he'll need my help for real.* A thought struck him and his skin drained of color. *They probably already know.*

"*We were out flying when Tokoyami called and the Commission hasn't tapped your phone.* Purple said logically. *"They don't know."*

"*Plus, Tokoyami isn't Kaminari."* Orange ignored Yellow's indignant squawk. *"He knows how to be subtle. In fact, if anything he might approach Aizawa with this."*

That made Hawks feel a bit better, if only slightly. He put his head in his hands. *I can't believe I was so* ***stupid****.*

"*Again: you thought Tokoyami was in danger."* Silver said, firmer than before. *"I would have reacted the same way."*

Hawks remembered what happened to her Tokoyami and repressed a shudder.

Green sighed and forced a cheerful tone. *"Look at the bright side: Tokoyami won't trust the Hero Commission."*

How *is that a bright side?*

"*They will not be able to swindle him."* Silver mused. *"And once he has some answers for himself, he'll probably warn at least my past self and Shoto as well."*

Yellow burst out laughing. It was more hysterical than amused.

"*Guys, the whole class will know about the Commission before the start of next term."* he cackled.

"*Good—"* Pink began.

"*—and the **traitor** will too!"*

The implications of that statement hit them all and Hawks stared hollowly at the ceiling.

*What have I **done** ?*

XXXXXXX

The Villain known as Daruma Ujiko was having a *wonderful* month. Between his work for All For One and the Hero Public Safety Commission, his schedule was full and his desire to experiment close to sated, leaving him humming and whistling as he walked through his lab. Around him, the next stage of Nomu floated serenely in their tanks. Most were little more than larvae, misshapen masses of flesh and brains in glorified jars, but some were so close to taking form.

Ujiko paused beside one of the containment units and could not stop himself from beaming at one of his more developed creations. He had worked hard on this one. A full five years of research, sweat, and Quirks had been used to their fullest extent, pushing past the limits of what could be done to create something that just might be the next step of Nomu evolution.

Smiling, Ujiko put a hand on the glass. The liquid inside it bubbled and he leaped back with a startled but delighted laugh. Ujiko did not allow himself to feel pride just yet, though he did allow himself a smile as he moved deeper into his lab, still whistling. It would not do to celebrate before his creation was tested and ready for deployment, after all. He was a man of science, and he knew many things could still go wrong. Still, if the worst happened and this project was a failure, Ujiko would mourn the wasted work and move on.

The phone he used for less upstanding activities rang and he answered it immediately, putting it on speakerphone as he continued to move around.

"All For One."

"*Doctor."* his more villainous boss replied.

More villainous. Ha! If Ujiko were to think about the hindering gibberish called 'morality', he supposed his other bosses were just as bad. If only he'd known what the Commission had been up to sooner. Why, he might have approached *them* with the Nomu project. What an amusing notion.

"*You've been spending a lot of time at your… other profession."* All For One continued.

Ujiko nodded to himself even though All For One could not see it. With all the Quirks in his possession, he might very well sense it, however. "The Commission gave me a new Villain to break. One Kai Chisaki."

"*Kai Chisaki."* All For One murmured, voice low with amusement. *"Another sniveling pup nipping at the heels of society as he sulks over the power he never had. Still, his Quirk is quite the catch, is it not?"*

Ujiko knew what All For One was going to say. "I apologize, but I cannot give you Chisaki's Quirk just yet. The Commission has actually poked their heads out of their close-minded bubbles long enough to realize how valuable he is. His conditioning is being closely monitored. If he dies during the procedure I will acquire his body and make sure his Quirk is added to the collection but otherwise I won't be able to claim him right now. Even if he survives, his loyalty will always be to me and by extension you. If the Quirk is worth our investment, I will bring him directly to you once he is a bit more compliant."

"*I see. Then it is victory either way."* All For One said, having expected that. *"And how goes our latest project?"*

"*Very* well." the Doctor reported, barely containing his excitement. "Nomu 210465's—"

"*Which one?"* All For One asked. His voice remained pleasant, but Ujiko could hear the cold demand for clarification.

Ujiko chuckled nervously. "Er, you likely recognize its code name 'Retiarius'. Retiarius's development has been simply astounding! I have not implemented the full brainwashing programs just yet but the base Quirks have merged perfectly, and the body…" He smiled widely, eyes filling with tears of joy. "You need to see it to believe how *perfect* it is. Its independent cognitive functions are higher than even Kurogiri's! Why, if it got out now I might not be able to stop it." He laughed at such a thought.

"*I shall take your word for it, my friend."* All For One said, amused. His chuckled, tone growing mocking. *"And what do you think about the Commission's attempts at villainy?"*

"Abysmal and inefficient, as always." Ujiko sniffed. "Relying on an unstable man's Quirk like that… *Bah!* What a waste. If they wanted to turn Hawks into a puppet, there are much simpler ways to do it."

"*I agree."* All For One said. *"Did you receive my notes on the little bird's companions? Do any catch your interest?"*

Ujiko absently considered the information passed on to him. "Not for their Quirks. None are worth taking."

"*The Mockingjay girl's Quirk could be useful for Retiarius."* All For One mentioned.

Ujiko snorted. "Nomu 210465 won't need such a pathetic Quirk. It will be perfect with the Quirks I have already supplied it." He found the files on the Heroes that worked at Hawks's Agency and flipped through them, searching for anything interesting. He found the Mockingjay girl's records. "Ah yes, I remember hearing of her. That trouble-making Phoenix wants to try her luck a second time and try burn down another corrupt Hero Organization, hmm?" He snorted. "Does she truly think she can start another revolution here in Japan? Foolish girl. The Commission is much more powerful than the Capitol ever was."

"*Which will make their inevitable collapse bring all of Hero Society down with it."* All For One said as fondly as someone spoke of an upcoming holiday. *"This isn't America. The public won't be made docile when it is revealed just what the Commission has done behind the scenes. The lovestruck fans certainly won't be pleased when they realize what their beloved Hawks went through."*

Ujiko adjusted his glasses and forced himself not to sound too eager. "Could I have him?"

"*Perhaps, perhaps not."* All For One murmured. *"It all depends on where he needs to be placed on the chess board. He may be a slave of the Commission but he's such a loved Hero. I don't want him to become another mindless Nomu when he could be so much more. Plus I think Twice may want to keep him himself."*

Ujiko tried not to show his disappointment. "Of course. Twice has become rather obsessed with catching the birdie."

All For One saw right through him. *"How about an alternative? You may not be interested in Mockingjay's Quirk, but surely the idea of another female Nomu may intrigue you? You have so few."*

"That's true." Ujiko acknowledged. "Male and female bodies do tend to have different limits before reaching the Singularity, depending on the base Quirk of course."

"*Then should the opportunity arise, feel free to take her."* All For One offered. *"Losing Katniss Everdeen will make Hawks even more isolated—"*

CRASH!

Ujiko jumped with a startled shout, dropping his phone, and whirled around to look behind him. Sweat beaded on his brow and he did not move until he heard All For One's angry exclamations coming from the speaker. He shakily picked up his phone again, holding it back to his ear.

"I apologize for the noise." Ujiko said with forced calm. "I merely dropped a beaker and startled myself."

He said goodbye to All For One and let his phone fall from his grasp.

Then he fell to his knees in front of the shattered containment unit for 210465 'Retiarius' and the hole in the wall behind it, and despaired at the years of lost work.

XXXXXXX

Best Jeanist was not a man who let his frustration show. As a highly ranked and respected Hero, he acted with dignity, composure, and strength, keeping a positive and level appearance to reassure all around him that he had the situation under control.

But not now.

Not right now.

Right now— alone in his Agency's office as he was— he could afford himself a moment of weakness, so he put his head in his hands and exhaled so he would not angrily shove the folder in front of him to the floor.

Jeanist did not know how she did it, but Mockingjay had uncovered enough evidence to bury the Commission so deeply they may as well be trapped in the mythical version of Tartarus. They could weasel, they could try to erase, they could make excuses and shift blame to scapegoats and victims, but inevitably their crimes would all point back to them. He had the sneaking suspicion she— and likely Miruko— had been compiling a case for a while, and after seeing what Hawks had been through, he would bet it was due to a fear that the Commission had been responsible for his disappearance.

That fear was more valid than Jeanist liked to admit.

Mockingjay had to have gotten some of these photos through less than legal means but any judge that was not corrupt would ignore how she acquired them. Some were as recent as Hawks's latest visit to Commission HQ. Others were more than a decade old. All of them showed the same golden hair, haunted eyes, and bruised skin.

It seemed Hawks had a lot of 'training accidents' over the years. Too many 'training accidents' to count. Too many pictures filled with bruises, cuts, broken bones and tattered wings for Jeanist to look at without feeling ill.

This was not training.

It was *abuse*, and Jeanist may just cast aside his veneer of calm and take a page from Miruko's book if someone argued otherwise. There was more than enough evidence to show at least Hawks's trainers and handlers had gone over the line in the folder alone.

But it was what was in the other folder that made Jeanist want to shove it away and not look at it, or he may just lose the calm he barely clung to. Inside the other folder were financial records detail Hawks's illegally-accrued debts to the Commission. The very first financial report was a mention of two hundred thousand yen, which had been taken from a Commission account and given to the Takami family.

Two hundred thousand yen, which they were given in exchange for their son.

Two hundred thousand yen was what people payed for an expensive Shiba Inu.

Two hundred thousand yen was what people paid for a *dog*.

Two hundred thousand yen was what the Takami's *son* had been worth to them.

Jeanist almost wished it ended there. It had not.

Since Hawks— *Keigo.* That was the name Detective Tsukauchi said he no longer knew.— had been six, he had been his family's financial provider. At least, the Commission had, piling debts onto his Hawks and leaving him to pay his parents and them from the moment he turned eighteen. His parents had no income. It *all* came from him, and according to the

Commission's carefully-traced records— So they made sure Hawks did not try to use his 'parent's' money for himself?— they spent a majority of it on alcohol, fancy cars, and trips.

They had gone to Hawaii three times in the past year alone.

They had gone on vacation to another country while their son was *missing*.

Did they even know? Or care?

Jeanist almost prayed Hawks did not know if they did, but he was not sure which option was crueler: Hawks knowing his parents did not care, or him being naively oblivious.

Either way, it was impossible for the Takamis to be unaware of what the Commission had put their son through— What they were *putting* him through. Present tense.

The next course of action should be clear.

Hawks needed to be safely extracted from that situation and the Commission needed to be brought to court.

The question was… *should* they?

The Commission was not simply a corrupt business. They were *the* Hero Public Safety Commission, who was responsible and trusted to keep civilians safe and Heroes in order. They had their hands in almost every aspect of Hero Society, from publicists to lawsuits to UA itself.

Personal courtesy demanded Jeanist and the others ask Hawks if he wanted to Commission exposed, but he suspected he knew what the younger Hero would say. The evidence would not just expose Hawks had been bought and abused. It would blow the Commission wide open, leaving their every skeleton unearthed for all of Japan to see. No, for the whole *world* to see. And the fallout would not be pretty. In fact, if this was exposed in the wrong way, it could bring everything crashing down and lead to anarchy.

Best Jeanist knew what had happened to American Hero Society's version of the Commission five years ago. The Capitol Hero Committee's fall had been highly publicized, with the Commission denouncing their extortion of Heroes and manipulation of American Hero Society in their favor. It was only through circumstance— and the presence of the reformed American Number One, Captain Celebrity— that Hero Society in the United States had not been damaged beyond repair.

American Hero Society did not have a League of Villains. They did not have a living, beloved, high-ranked young Hero who had been taken in by a trusted organization and abused since childhood. They did not have a Symbol of Peace who looked uncomfortable when Jeanist offhandedly mentioned his retirement being far in the future.

Jeanist was not dumb. In the time he had spent investigating with All Might and his secretary, he knew *something* was amiss. He hoped he was wrong, but he had a feeling that the Symbol

of Peace— the pillar of Hero Society that just may keep them standing if the Commission's actions were exposed— might not be around for as long as they needed.

That left the investigators with a horrible conundrum. Should they try to convince Hawks to become the whistleblower for the Commission— which would result in the Commission knowing it was him, for there was no way they wouldn't— while the Symbol of Peace was still around to hold Hero Society together?

Or should they leave things hidden as Hawks likely believed was necessary, leaving him and countless others under the Commission's oppressive boot while also increasing the risk that the Commission's crimes would be exposed in the worst way possible, at the worst time?

If not for the League of Villains and Stain's circling ideology, Jeanist would push for the former option. But right now— even with All Might as strong as ever as far as the public knew— Hero Society was at a tipping point, whether people realized it or not. What it meant to be a Hero was in question, and if one of the trusted pillars was proven to have partaken in illegal activities— some of which could rightfully be compared to *Quirk Trafficking*— everything could come crumbling down.

A heavy knock on the door jolted Jeanist out of his thoughts. Although it was likely All Might or Miruko, he hid the incriminating folders in a drawer on his desk. One could never be too cautious.

"You may enter."

The door opened to reveal the last person he expected. He rose from his chair.

"Endeavor. I was not aware you were coming to my Agency today."

"I was not planning on it." Endeavor said. His cold blue eyes were narrowed to slits. "However, I've heard something *interesting*." He planted his hands on Jeanist's desk— he had best not burn it— and leaned forward, eyes cold. "You, *All Might*, Hawks, and Miruko have all been conducting a secretive investigation. For all of you to work together, it must be big. What is it?"

Jeanist noted he did not mention Tsukauchi. "Hawks has not been a part of anything." he stated. "And who has told you that?"

Endeavor's lip curled. "All Might implied he was working with you before realizing he was running his mouth. You all know I am the best investigator of the Ranked Heroes. Why have you not asked for my assistance?"

Jeanist was too composed to ask a higher power for patience, but he had to admit he was getting close. "We did not think it was required since we have All Might—"

That was the wrong thing to say. Endeavor's teeth clenched loudly enough for Jeanist to hear them.

Jeanist sighed. "But if you'd like to take a look, you may. As long as you tell no one."

"I am a professional. I know better than to have a loose tongue, unlike that American." Endeavor said coldly.

It took a second for Jeanist to realize he was talking about All Might. He did not comment on it. He simply inclined his head and slowly pushed the folders towards Endeavor. He watched Endeavor pick one up and open it, scanning the notes and evidence. Jeanist studied his face for any reaction, but Endeavor remained focused and professional. Jeanist almost wished he could manage that emotional detachment instead of feeling the desire to burn the world down.

Eventually, Endeavor threw the folders back onto the desk. "You're wasting your time."

Jeanist's eyebrows shot up. "I beg your pardon?"

Endeavor shook his head in disgust. "I don't know what tale that imbecile has fabricated, but he's clearly wasted your time—"

"Hawks has not told us about this *or* asked us to do anything." Jeanist interjected levelly.

Endeavor shook his head and flicked a dismissive hand towards the folders. Jeanist was half-prepared to dive across the desk to make sure they did not catch on fire but destroying them did not seem to be Endeavor's intent. Jeanist made a mental note to save multiple copies of everything and scatter them across Japan both physically and electronically.

"Then Hawks still has a sliver of my respect." Endeavor continued sternly. "I don't know what that American oaf has gotten into his head, but there are no crimes here to investigate. Hawks clearly got those injuries from training—"

"He got them from *abuse*, Enji." Jeanist said softly. His eyes closed and breathed, counting down from ten so he did not punch the Number Two Hero. "The Commission *tortured* him with a pain-enhancing Quirk and *beat him* as recently as last month" His gritted his teeth and forced himself to keep his composure. "Tsukauchi and I were alerted to the situation and had to get him out. It was like he had been captured by *Villains*, not in the care of his 'managers'."

Endeavor frowned and crossed his arms. "That is a serious accusation, Jeanist. You do realize that if this is true, it will only cause problems if it is exposed, correct? If Hawks has not come forward to claim the Commission illegally tortured and imprisoned him, you should drop it. It's obvious he has moved on and has no desire to press charges."

Did you not read the reports? The Commission will financially drown or quite literally kill Hawks if he steps out of line. And it's barely been a few weeks. I highly doubt Hawks has 'moved on'. Jeanist kept those thoughts to himself as he reminded himself that he was not Miruko and could not get away with kicking another Hero in the face. "I would not be able to call myself a Hero if I ignore this, Endeavor."

"Tch. Real Heroes do not need Heroes to save them." Endeavor shot the folders an annoyed look and turned away. "It seems you and All Might have this under control. I won't waste my time then."

He walked out, and Jeanist could not say he was upset to see him go.

XXXXXXX

Today was the day.

No more delays. No more wallowing. No more self-doubt. No more procrastinating.

Today, Jin Bubaigawara was going to walk up to Hawks and offer to be friends.

He could do this.

He *would* do this.

Just walk up, and ask to be friends like he wanted.

The worst that could happen was rejection. After all, there was no way Hawks knew he was a Villain. The League had not done anything yet. Twice was just on standby.

He could do this.

He could wave Hawks down as he passed on patrol, and offer to be friends.

Simple. Easy. No problem.

He could—

What am I doing. What the hell am I doing. I'm following the advice of some random lady I saw in a bar who kind of maybe knew I'm part of the League. It's probably a trap. But if it isn't a trap this might be my last chance to not be a stalker-weirdo even though I'm kinda a stalker weirdo even though I'm not what the hell am I ***thinking*** *arrrrrrrrrgggggghhhhh—*

If someone bothered to observe a blond-haired, scarred man lingering in a park along Hawks's normal patrol route, they would see him clutch at his head in a not-splitting but definitely-panicking way as he let loose a noise only the most anxious people could utter. Twice gritted his teeth and dragged his hands down his face, determined not to put on his mask just yet. He could keep it together.

Twice breathed in and out, counting each inhale and exhale, and watched the sky. If his memorized schedule was correct— He was still *not* a stalker, okay?— Hawks should fly by in a few minutes. All Twice had to do was wave him down and let things happen. That was all. He could do this. Okay.

The ringing of Twice's phone made him jump a foot in the air, letting loose a surprised shriek that would sound more natural coming from a startled cat. He fumbled with his phone, recognizing Giran's number. He scowled and answered.

"Giran! You scared me, ass—"

"*Oh, is that whose number it came up as? I wasn't certain."*

Ice water slid down Twice's spine and gathered in his chest, making it tight enough he physically choked. Pain lanced through his head and he clutched at it, physically holding himself together.

"All For One— Er, bossman." he stammered. His scowl returned. "What the hell do you want?"

...Did he just cuss at the scary evil Nomu-creating Lord of the Villain Underworld?

Shit.

All For One listened in silence as Twice struggled to breathe, not needing to do a thing to the man as his own mind threatened to tear itself apart.

"*There's no need to worry, my friend."* All For One said, as pleasant and smooth as poisoned honey. *"I'm simply calling to see how your personal mission is going.*"

Twice's mouth went dry. "Personal… mission?"

"*Why, your mission to gather information on Hawks, of course."* All For One teased, as if it were silly that he had asked. *"Did you think I wouldn't notice what you were doing?"*

No parts of Twice could muster a response.

"*I truly admire your initiative."* All For One continued 'warmly'. *"Your comrades are content to wait for orders, but you… you went out on your own to spy on the enemy. Information can be as valuable as brute force. When you deeply study a person, you can find every weakness they try to hide and use it to tear them apart piece by piece."*

"That's nice." Twice forced out.

He did not wonder if All For One could do that to him. It wasn't even a question.

But does he know about Hawks's other personalities?

Twice could only hope that All For One did not see him pale. Who was he kidding? He was probably watching him right now and enjoying the show.

"Do you… expect a report, boss?" Twice forced himself to ask.

Okay, I am not going to mention Hawks's possible headspace friends. Have to downplay his panic attack too— Shit, I told Dabi about it in Kurogiri's bar. And I researched Hawks there I'm so ***stupid*** *—*

"*Not yet."* All For One said in that creepily patient tone. *"I just need you to remember not to become too enthralled by him. Remember what Hero Society has done to you and why it must be… changed."* '*Destroyed*' is what he meant. Twice could hear the smile in his voice. *"I'll let you keep him afterward, of course."*

Was All For One implying what Twice thought he was? Did he think Twice wanted to keep Hawks as a *pet* or something? Was *that* what he interpreted Twice's interest in friendship as? Some sick desire to obtain the Winged Hero like a trophy? And here Twice thought *his* head was messed up.

Twice kept those thoughts to himself and swallowed a disgusted retch. "Yeah. I know better than to be drawn in by false Heroes."

It was the truth and not a lie— All For One would know if he was lying— because Twice knew Hawks was different. He was not Endeavor, who was too brutal and dismissive and cold. He was not All Might, who was well-intentioned but simply did not understand Hero Society was flawed and decrepit under its casing of golden gift wrap, making outcasts of those that did not fit into its mold.

But Twice knew All For One would not care about that. He would only see Twice's intentions towards Hawks as something villainous. He already thought that, seeing Twice's interest as a way for him to get information on a Hero. If Twice approached Hawks now, All For One would want him to manipulate the Winged Hero. Maybe he would want Twice to gain his trust just so he could break him.

Twice wouldn't do it.

He knew he wouldn't.

All For One would not take it well.

There was no way he would let Twice just walk away from the League. He would not let Twice walk away regardless. His Quirk was too valuable. Twice closed his eyes and saw himself in a tank like the Nomu, his eyes a blank white and wide with agony—

"I think I'm done observing for now. I was planning on heading back to Kurogiri's today anyway." Twice found himself saying.

"*Good."* All For One was definitely smiling now. *"I'm glad you remember where your real friends are."*

He hung up.

Twice spent the next few minutes staring at his phone as he tried to force his heartbeat down. He heard a quiet rushing sound and dove behind a tree, huddling down and covering his mouth.

Above him, Hawks passed by, ignorant to the Villain hiding in the foliage.

Twice waited until he left to move, leaning his head against the rough bark of the tree. He imagined a world where he offered to be friends with Hawks the moment they met, where they went to bars but Hawks did not have to worry about being pressured into drinking, where they could go to see dumb movies and laugh at how cheesy they were, where they each had someone there who would sit by them when they split, where there was someone to

call in the middle of the night who knew exactly what 'splitting' meant. Where two people no longer felt so alone even when surrounded by others.

We would have been friends, Twice realized.

And didn't that thought split his heart in two?

XXXXXXX

Hawks's week did not get any better.

Miruko kept avoiding him, Toshinori was hovering, he still could not visit Eri and feared approaching Tokoyami without a Commission-proof excuse, and since he gave Aizawa the first notebook, the Underground Hero kept asking for more details and clarifications at odd hours. Did that man *ever* sleep?

Worse, the Commission seemed to think he wasn't working hard enough and was sending him more and more missions and cases. He had no idea what he had done to anger them so badly — Please let it not have to do with Tokoyami. *Please.* Let his student stay off their radar.— but it seemed they had decided he needed to be punished for some unknown slight.

His workload was getting bad enough that he had to get his sidekicks on more cases too, something he felt horrible about as they came in earlier and left later each day. None of them complained, but Hawks heard a few wonder when crime rates had gone up.

Hawks was so exhausted he never made it back to Miruko's apartment, instead collapsing on the couch at his office and sleeping there. Perhaps it was for the best since he could give Rumi the space she wanted. She was still angry at him for some reason, but it was fine. She was allowed to be annoyed with him. If he wasn't so tired, maybe he could figure out what he had done wrong…

That exhaustion also meant Ennea could not go out. Hawks did not have the time or energy, and he could feel the voices getting antsy. They tried to keep it to themselves but their walls were still unstable and prone to cracking, making it harder to sleep. The voices used to be able to 'check out' to get some 'rest' but now even they could not escape Hawks's bone-deep exhaustion.

The bags under his eyes were covered with makeup, as was the paleness of his skin. He drank more coffee than was healthy, though even Silver had become too tired to bother him about it. Seriously, whatever miracle concoction Aizawa had to remain functioning, Hawks wanted some.

It was only ten in the morning on Monday— nearly a week after his misdiagnosis— but Hawks could already feel himself lagging. He landed on the top of a building to take a breather, huddled behind a generator as he prayed no one would see him slacking off. A ping indicating he had an incoming communication went through his headphones and he pushed himself up, answering it.

"Hawks here."

"*You need to get back to the Kettle."* Mockingjay said, her voice even harsher than usual due to her own exhaustion. *"We have another murder case."*

"Dammit." Hawks breathed. "I'm on my way."

He hung up and flew quickly towards his Agency as the wind rushed past him.

"*I can't believe there's **another** case."* Green said tiredly. *"Are we sure the Commission isn't trying to sabotage us?"*

"*What delusional reality have you been living in that you haven't realized that's **exactly what's happening**?"* Orange snapped, even angrier than usual.

It was telling that Green just sighed tiredly and Silver did not lecture Orange for being rude.

Hawks arrived at his office, entering through the window. He landed a bit less gracefully than he meant to and nearly face planted into the wall. He stumbled sideways to avoid the collision and sturdy arms caught him before he could face plant into the ground instead. He looked up at Mockingjay— her mask was up, exposing her shadowed eyes— and smiled tiredly.

"Hey."

Her lips twisted into a frown and she helped him stand. "We're trying to do too much. We need help."

Hawks wearily eyed the piles of papers on his desk and missed the days when they were shorter than him. "From another Agency?"

"Yes."

"Put the request in." Hawks said instantly. "Maybe Tensei— I mean, Ingenium can help out." He glanced at the file in her hands. "After we discuss that." he amended.

Mockingjay passed him the file. He reluctantly opened it, reading its contents as he forced himself to look at the gory images inside. He could not tell whether he and the voices had simply seen worse before or if they were just too damn tired because they barely flinched at the photos of a body.

"Another murder victim was found by a jogger this morning." Mockingjay reported. "He was wrapped in some type of thin rope-like material that left marks on the body, stabbed, and strangled. It's the same MO as four other cases we've had in the past couple weeks."

Hawks's stomach dropped. "Serial killer?"

"Possibly." Mockingjay said darkly. "The victims were three men and two women. All of them were in their early to mid twenties with light hair, and had physical mutations as part of their Quirk."

Hawks nibbled on his lip. "What types of Quirks, exactly?"

Mockingjay took the file back from him and flipped through it. "The first man was killed Thursday. He had silver-blond hair and devil horns. No extra abilities. The first woman was killed on Saturday. She had golden hair, sheep horns and a dream walking Quirk. The second woman was killed Sunday. Whitish-blond hair, and a Quirk that gave her snake-like scales covering her body. The second man was found Monday. His Quirk gave him elephant-like features and the ability to manipulate memory. He had pale blond hair. And the latest victim, killed Wednesday, found today, would always land on his feet no matter the height he fell from. He had blond hair and white feline ears, claws, and a tail. The police think there might be another victim we haven't found yet."

"So we may be dealing with an anti-mutant killer." Hawks murmured. "Has there been any CRC activity in the area?"

The Creature Rejection Clan tended to avoid Fukuoka since it contained Hawks's Agency. They tended to avoid *any* city where stronger mutant-type Pro Heroes operated since, like the cowards they were, they went after the helpless but scattered when faced with an opponent that could actually fight back.

"If there has, they haven't been shouting it from the rooftops. Besides…" she grimaced. "The CRC tends to remove the 'inhuman' parts and burn them to 'exorcise the demons'. The victims weren't mutilated."

Hawks repressed a gag and did his best not to think about removed wings. "Still, anti-mutant bigotry is a likely possibility."

"I'll mention it in my request." Mockingjay said. She hesitated, and put a hand on his arm. "Are you going to be okay?"

Hawks blinked at her with his human eyelids. They felt kind of heavy. "Hmm?"

"I'm not blind." she said flatly. "I know the Commission is pushing all this work onto us. Normally you'd protest about teaming up with another Agency because those scumbags would be even harsher on you for 'relying on those beneath your Rank.'" She put on a tone similar to the Commission President's and Hawks had to repress a shiver. "When I mentioned teaming up, you didn't even protest."

Hawks managed a tired smile. "I know I'll probably get in trouble for it later, but we do need the help. This isn't about me, it's about saving lives. Especially if we *are* dealing with a serial killer."

"Hmm." Hawks knew that was Mockingjay-speak for 'I disagree with you but I'm not going to say anything'. She dropped her hand from his arm and pulled her mask down over her face. "I'll get the request out."

"Thanks, Kat." Hawks said. "You're the best."

"Oh, I know." she said with her usual dry sarcasm. "Just like I know you will sleep at home tonight."

Hawks winced but kept his smile in place. "That's a really clunky change of subject." She glared at him knowingly. "Hey, staying here has been beneficial for both me and the group of Heroes you got to watch over me when I'm there. You know they don't have to guard me here. Who am I to deny them more time off?"

Mockingjay sighed loudly. "At least go home and get your mail tonight. You haven't been at the apartment since Thursday. Your bills probably showed up."

Hawks bit his lip. "You're right. I'll go."

"And stay there for the night." Mockingjay stated.

"And stay there for the night." Hawks echoed obediently.

He went back out on patrol and stopped a few villains, met a few fans, and signed a few autographs. Despite the comparative ease of his day, he found himself stumbling as he headed to Miruko's apartment. He opened the door to see her coat and shoes were not in the usual place. She wasn't home yet.

Hawks relaxed and entered the apartment, shutting and locking the door behind him. A stack of envelopes were in a basket on the counter and he realized Miruko must have been getting his mail. The fact that she had not texted or called him to let him know he had some made his stomach twist but he forced himself not to think about it.

Hawks took out the envelopes and flipped through them. Junk mail, ad, junk mail, ad, ad, another ad, junk mail…

He paused as he caught sight of a familiar logo.

His bill from the Commission was here.

Hawks slowly picked up the innocent-looking envelope and inspected it carefully. He would not put it past the Commission to put some substance in it to knock him out. They'd done it before to teach him to not be a reckless fool when opening packages. There was a chance a villain would find out his address and send him something nasty that was not a simple hate letter.

Once the Commission had even put razor blades inside the opening of the envelope. His fingers had been bandaged for weeks but he'd learned his lesson to not be too enthusiastic when opening mail.

"*I hate them."* Green said suddenly. He almost sounded surprised, as if he had not known he were capable of feeling such vitriol.

Hawks turned on the sink and took out a letter opener. He carefully sliced the envelope open. No powder sprayed in his face so he turned the water back off, not needing it to rinse his eyes. He took out the heavy stack of papers inside and reluctantly opened it, skimming through the lines of words and numbers.

There was the money owed to his parents. There was the payment for his training. There was the interest for the expensive items so 'kindly' loaned to him in the past. There was the accumulated payments he missed on his apartment. There were the medical bills—

Hawks did a double-take.

He…

He had to pay *medical*?

Hawks stared at the bill, taking in the payments again, just to be sure he read it right. This had to be a mistake. Japan had universal health care for citizens and even foreigners. At most he would have to pay around thirty percent of the bill. Not to mention an MRI was only supposed to cost between ten thousand to seventeen thousand yen in total. Not *four hundred thirty-four thousand* yen. Those prices were what Americans warned foreigners coming to their country about. They weren't like that here.

"*It's not that much."* Red said, sounding confused.

"*He could pay for a small apartment for about eight or nine months with that money."* Pink whispered to her.

"...*Oh."* Red said faintly.

Hawks went through the math. He went through it again. And again. He could hear the voices going over it too. No matter how many times they calculated, the numbers did not add up.

He couldn't pay for his bills. He couldn't even pay the minimum payment. That meant next month's payment would go up, and he'd once again be unable to pay. So it would go up again, leaving him even worse off. And then it would go up again. And again. And…

Hawks laid his head on the countertop and took a shuddering breath.

"*How can they get away with this?"* Silver exploded.

Pretty wording, Hawks thought bitterly. He scrubbed a hand over his face and shoved the bills away from him, flipping them over so he would not have to see them.

"*I see why you're trapped with them now."* Yellow said weakly.

"*They'll arrest you if you try to break free, won't they?"* Purple guessed darkly. *"They'll claim it's because you won't pay your debts."*

Hawks had to laugh at his naivety. *That's a **cute** thought. Nah, they'd never arrest me for that. They don't care about the money. They just want me singing in their cage. If I stop, they'll do **much worse** than arrest me.*

The door opened.

Hawks jumped, moving so the counter was between him and it—

Miruko spotted him at the counter and paused in the doorway. An expression flashed across her face too quickly for him to decipher and she walked over to the fridge without greeting him, opening it. She grabbed a drink— was that *another* bottle of alcohol*?*— and a few foodstuffs and kicked the fridge door shut.

"I'll eat in my room."

She stalked out before he could reply and shut her bedroom door.

Hawks could only stare after her, more stunned than hurt. His nerves drained away and something close to relief replaced them.

*Okay, something is **definitely** up.*

"*Or she hates us."* Orange said snidely.

Hawks adamantly shook his head. *No, you don't get it. I know Rumi. She **wouldn't** act like this unless something really got under her skin. And even then she wouldn't give me the cold shoulder for a week…*

"*Has she been replaced?"* Purple asked sharply. *"Like with a clone or something?"*

*It's concerning **that's** your first thought.* Hawks stomach dropped. *Please don't tell me one of the Villains can do that.*

"*Not yet. They eventually got hold of a Quirk that could turn Quirk-created Hero clones into puppets who would obey the PLF."*

Oh. Hawks swallowed. *Should I add that to the Future notebook or delay so I don't give Aizawa more things to stress about? At this rate he's going to have grey hair within the month*. The joke was weak even to his own ears.

"*We'll make a separate notebook covering the Villains in detail."* Green decided.

"*Back to Miruko."* Silver interjected. *"What are the chances she has been replaced or hit with a Quirk?"*

I have no clue since she isn't staying in a room with me long enough for me to spot anything weird. And I don't remember how she was acting when I first woke up. I might have to ask Aizawa.

"*Does the Commission have any brainwashing Quirks?"* Green asked. *"Or maybe ones that affect emotions and make people more aggressive?"*

They probably do. But it's more likely Miruko's just angry. Hawks glanced worriedly toward Miruko's shut door. *Should I just confront her?*

"*Do it. I'm sick of this bullshit."* Orange growled.

"*That may not be wise."* Silver cautioned at the same time.

For once, Hawks had to agree with Orange. *Orange is right. It's been over a week. I've given her enough space. And even if she yells at me, she won't hurt me.*

"*If she's under a Quirk, she might."* Green said.

Then I'll fight back and—

"**Will** *you?"* Purple challenged.

Hawks scowled and deigned to ignore him. He hesitantly tiptoed to Miruko's closed door and knocked. He heard movement inside but no indication he should come in.

"Rumi? It's me. Obviously." He meant to laugh but it came out as a tired sigh.

"Go away." Miruko's muffled voice came through the door.

Hawks fought the instinct to hastily apologize and retreat. He set his jaw. "No. We're going to talk now."

He opened the door and—

"I SAID *GO AWAY!*"

A beer bottle hit the wall beside Hawks's head. He froze in place, heart in his throat as he watched trickles of brown liquid drip down the wallpaper. Miruko looked similarly frozen, her arm still raised from when she'd thrown the bottle. The horrified look on her face vanished behind a harsh expression.

"What part of '*go away*' do you fail to understand?" she snarled, storming up to him and jabbing him in the chest with her finger.

When Hawks was eighteen, he would have taken one look at her and quickly mumbled an apology before hiding in a small space somewhere and praying she did not follow. Hawks still had half a mind to apologize, but Miruko had taught him to stand his ground. Plus, this was *Rumi*, not the Commission or Kae— or his parents. She would not hurt him.

"I understand it more than you do since you seem to think I'll leave you upset." he said levelly. "You've been avoiding me all week. I know I can be annoying but isn't that a bit much? If you needed some 'me time'— as in time without my annoying and sassy self— you could just say so."

Miruko did not poke him for his jokes or roll her eyes. Instead she stared at him in stony silence, her only change in expression being the slight twist of her lips, as if she were trying not to show an emotion. There were dark shadows under her eyes, he realized, much like his own. Had she gotten any sleep all week?

He softened his voice. "Rumi, you're not someone who avoids talking about things like this. You don't isolate yourself either. You're blunt and— sometimes over— confident, and you always tell me why you're upset instead of…" He glanced at the dripping alcohol and away. "...wallowing. What's going on?"

She remained silent, lips pressed thin.

"*Please*, let me help you." Hawks pleaded.

He saw her jaw quiver. "You're such a hypocrite."

Hawks nodded. "I know."

She laughed bitterly. "I'm a hypocrite, too."

"How so?" Hawks asked with deceptive lightness.

Miruko reached up and pushed at his shoulder. There was no strength behind it. "I'm trying to shove you away." Her attempted pun was miserably inefficient because he could hear the choked undertone of her voice.

"It's not working very well." Hawks noted. "I mean, I had my usual self-doubts and existential crises but I'm beginning to suspect you're not angry at me."

Miruko's shoulders slumped. "You're right. I'm not angry at you. I'm angry at *me*." She glanced up and he recognized the look in her eyes now. *Fear.* "The Commission called me on Saturday. They want me to do something for them and I don't think I have a choice."

The sentence Hawks heard her say made no sense at all. Miruko would *never* work for the Commission willingly. So what had they done to force her?

She seemed to read his mind. "They know something's weird about your Quirk, Hawks." Hawks felt the blood drain from his face. "Agreeing was the only way I could stop them from dragging you to a *lab* somewhere. Not even prison or a mental ward. A *lab*. The President said— She said they were going to— to—"

She was shaking.

Miruko— strong, grinning, laugh-in-the-face-of-danger Rumi— was *shaking*.

Hawks forced himself to speak. "Rumi, I can handle—"

"*No*. You are not 'handling' anything. And it's *not* your fault." Miruko stated. Hawks had to wonder if she really could read his mind. "I stepped over the line too many times and they got pissed at me. They would have found another excuse to threaten you to make me do what they say." She lurched towards him, movements haphazard as if she were drunk, and yanked him into one of her patented bone-crushing hugs. "You need to promise me something." She hugged him as tightly as she could, nearly squeezing the air from his lungs. "Don't let them coerce you into anything. I don't care if they threaten me, or offer to release me if you submit and be their cadaver. You're not doing it, understand?"

"They already own me, Rumi." Hawks whispered. "If I could get you out—"

"I won't forgive you." Miruko stated. She sounded completely calm but her eyes were glassy.

Hawks wanted to argue. He really did. In fact, he was already compiling plans to offer himself up like a lamb to the slaughter— and studiously ignoring the voices' protests that he didn't. He had to worry about them surviving too but *damn it*. *He* was the one trapped by the Commission. Miruko shouldn't become another pawn in their chess set. Certainly not for him. Knowing she'd argue, he wisely kept those thoughts to himself— well, he kept them from Miruko.

"So they threatened me?" he said with a casualness more appropriate for commentary on the weather. "That's why you've been so grumpy all week? You thought you'd act distant to try to scare me off? I don't know if I should be offended that you thought I wouldn't notice something was wrong or horrified you thought that would work. Your deception skills are terrible."

Miruko burst out laughing.

It was *not* the kind of laughter he wanted or expected.

It was desperate and hysterical, like the laugh of someone who saw they'd been badly injured and realized they were dying.

To Hawks's horror, tears streamed down Miruko's cheeks as she continued to laugh. Even worse, the laughter did not reach her red eyes, giving them a dull, empty look. She stared at him with those haunted, tear-filled eyes and kept on grinning so widely he was sure it hurt.

"I'm going to *die*." She giggled. "They're sending me on a *suicide mission*."

That changed everything.

"What do you need?" Hawks asked instantly. "When's the mission? Which Commission agents are involved? Depending on who it is we might have time to—"

He remembered the apartment was bugged and cut himself off, silently continuing his thought process on how to fake Miruko's death and get her out of the country. Yes, they would know he had done something but if he could get Miruko out he could face whatever punishment they gave him. He would not break and tell them where she was.

"Remembered our eavesdroppers, huh?" Miruko asked bitterly. "They'll probably give me shit for telling you but *they don't own me.*" Her voice lowered to a hiss, and Hawks found relief in the reminder that Miruko would not just roll over and die like the Commission wanted. "They're not sending me *to* die. Not specifically. I've just been sent a long-term mission I'm definitely unsuited for. As in 'I could make a rookie mistake and get myself *killed*' unsuited for. So if I die on this mission, what a fucking tragedy it'd be, right?" Her smile did not reach her eyes again. "I mean, can you picture *me* as a spy?"

Hawks couldn't breathe. Flashes of gruesome wounds, missing wings, and horrific torture burned their way through his consciousness and he smelled blood and burnt flesh.

"*No."* Yellow whispered.

"*It can't be...*" Pink breathed, horrified.

Hawks barely noticed as Green accidentally took over, slipping silently into the background as everything turned grey.

"Who?" Green croaked, using Hawks's mouth.

Miruko did not seem to notice the change. She was laughing again, likely so she would not begin throwing more things or cry.

"They want *me* to infiltrate this Villain organization called the Meta Liberation Army to 'bring it down from the inside'. *Ha!* Can you picture it? *Me*, walking up to a MLA member and saying I want to join their Destro-worshiping cult." She laughed and laughed as her smile never reached her eyes and her nails bit into her palms hard enough to leave drips of blood on her hands. "What a fucking *joke*."

Plans to Save a Life

Hawks wondered if fate was determined to make the people he cared about suffer. First he let slip about the Commission to Tokoyami, now… *this*.

Miruko has been ordered to infiltrate the Meta Liberation Army.

Miruko has been ordered to infiltrate the Meta Liberation Army ***by the Commission****.*

How did I let this happen?

Hawks was completely unsurprised that Miruko did a complete one-eighty after their talk. Instead of avoiding him, she stuck to him like a bee on honey and refused to leave his side when he would otherwise be alone. Hawks knew it was because she did not trust him not to run off to the Commission and sell his soul for her safety.

Her mission had not started yet. There was still time. He could save her from this, somehow.

Because there was no doubt in his mind that Miruko would face the same fate as his future self had if she accepted this mission.

Miruko had as much undercover work training as any Pro Hero.

Which was *close to none* considering she was a battle Hero specializing in public Villain take downs.

If she approached the Meta Liberation Army as she was, they would *kill* her, probably to send a message to the Commission or the public. Or both. There was no doubt about that considering they would not allow her to expose their top brass as the Villains they were. Based on Green's toneless info dumps, many members of the Meta Liberation Army were indoctrinated to the point of being fanatical and would kill people they had known for *years* if they so much as joked about Destro being a terrorist. That included their current leader, Re-Destro, who had murdered his own secretary for such a slight in the voices' timeline.

So Hawks had to either stop Miruko from going on this mission or somehow train her in the finer aspects of espionage in the short amount of time before it began. That included laying the groundwork for making a believable reason for her to want to join the Meta Liberation Army.

However, most of those reasons would have to be shown publicly for them to be believable, which could be a huge blow to Miruko's reputation considering how… *controversial*— and to some, outright treasonous— those reasons would have to be.

Hawks had no idea what she had done to piss off the Commission so badly, but it was clear they wanted her to suffer. In fact, he had a bad feeling the Commission would make her

commit to her 'optional' mission even if he walked into their lab and offered his literal brain for them to pick apart.

So he sat in his office when he should have started patrol hours ago, his thoughts going a mile a minute as he tried to come up with a way to get Miruko out of the mess she'd found herself in. Again and again he glanced towards his phone and scrolled to the Commission President's number, but he never called her as Miruko's final words to him this morning echoed in his head.

"*Don't call them. Don't try to meet with them. I mean it when I say I won't forgive you if you give yourself up for me. If I've pissed them off enough for them to do this, you know they'll keep on trying."*

Hawks slumped in his chair and caught sight of his miserable reflection in his full cup of coffee. He looked away and rubbed his chest, which felt strangely tight.

I don't know what to do.

"*I know the Commission can be cruel, but this is* ***outrageous****!"* Silver exploded. *"Miruko's mission makes no sense!"*

"*The Meta Liberation Army isn't even a threat at the moment."* Green added, his frustration jabbing at Hawks like a scalpel to the head. *"They've been stewing underground for years and didn't get a reason to head back into the spotlight until after All Might retired. There's no reason to send Miruko after them now. If the Commission wanted to take them down, they could use other resources."*

They don't care about taking the MLA down. They want to take down ***Rumi*** *as cruelly and humiliatingly as possible,* Hawks thought. *The MLA is just the convenient gun they're pointing at her head.* He hunched over his cooling cup of coffee and gripped his hair. ***Please****, is there anything you know from your past that would explain why they're gunning for her?*

"*Nothing. We did not know her well."* Red said sadly. She hesitated, reluctance clear in her presence, but pressed on. *"Gold… I think they fully expect her to fail. They probably know— or at least suspect— that Rikiya Yotsubashi is the leader of the MLA. He's the CEO of the Deternat Company, which supplies Quirk support and lifestyle gear to the public. A lot of people rely on that gear to function normally. If he's arrested and his business goes down, it would cause chaos."*

If they won't let me investigate Endeavor because it could cause a disturbance, they definitely won't risk Re-Destro and his top accomplices' identities going public, Hawks acknowledged miserably. *But if Miruko does survive a while, then they get some juicy information for a bit. Isn't that* ***nice****?* He took a breath and shoved his fear away. *We need to account for not getting her out of this. What can you tell me that I can pass on as intel I coincidentally stumbled across?*

"Slidin' Go is a member." Green said instantly.

"Fuck that guy." Orange snarled.

"Agreed." White said darkly. *"He acts affable but don't let his smile and rather—"*

"*Stupid looking."* Orange sneered.

White ignored him. *"—odd appearance fool you. He's **completely** loyal to the Meta Liberation Army and is quite dangerous."*

'*Kills people for laughing at Destro's legacy', dangerous?*

"*Most likely. As I said, he's completely loyal to the MLA and takes personal offense at those who threaten the hierarchy."*

So approaching him as Miruko's first contact would be a bad idea. *How did other me get into contact with the MLA?*

"*Through the League of Villains and Dabi."* Pink replied.

Hawks wondered how she got that information before remembering her and Yellow's investigation into other him's mission. *So that route's out. We are **not** letting them unite.* He dragged a hand through his hair and felt a few strands yank loose. *We need to make Miruko's interest believable. That would mean she'd have to **show** some interest where people would notice. But doing that could ruin her reputation and give the Commission an excuse to revoke her Hero license.*

He tried not to think '*And kill her.*' but the implication lingered between them.

"*Either way, the Commission gets what they want."* Purple said darkly.

Hawks gritted his teeth. *They're not. We won't let them.*

"Hawks?"

He sprang back from the table, knocking over his chair and coffee as he summoned razor-sharp feathers to hover at his shoulders. Mockingjay raised her hands peacefully, completely calm despite the floating weapons mere inches from her face.

"It's me."

Hawks winced and reattached his feathers to his wings. "Sorry."

Grey eyes scrutinized him. "You're terrified." Hawks stiffened. "I can hear it in your voice. What happened?"

Hawks opened his mouth, shut it, and glanced around furtively before remembering that his office may be the only Commission-free place he had. Many would be horrified that he was considering telling Mockingjay the truth— even the voices were hesitant— but they did not know Katniss like him.

"The Commission's pressuring Miruko into a mission that might get her killed."

The reaction was instantaneous. "**What do you need me to do?**"

Mockingjay's voice came out as a low growl, far beyond the range most human vocal chords were capable of. It made Pink and Green startle, while Yellow twitched nervously. To Hawks, however, her quiet fury was a relief.

"Kat, I know your workload is already awful but I need you to find everything you can about the Meta Liberation Army. And…" he hesitated. "Maybe can you… contact your old teacher? For Rumi."

He braced himself for the heavy question to linger uncomfortably in the air, because if there was one thing he knew about Mockingjay, it was that she hated anything from her past being brought up. To his relief— and surprise— she did not even blink.

"Got it." She headed out, only to pop her head back through the door. "The request for assistance went through. I don't know who they're sending yet but they'll be here later next week."

"Good." Hawks said after a pause.

With everything else going on, he'd almost forgotten about the murder investigation.

He was too tense to feel guilty.

Mockingjay walked out and Hawks knew he would not see her for the rest of the day. Maybe the week.

"*Voice manipulation."* Yellow said.

Hawks blinked. *Huh?*

"*Mockingjay's Quirk is..."* His confident voice dimmed. *"...some type of voice manipulation?"*

Hawks's lips quirked upward. *You're close.*

"'*Close' is another word for 'wrong.' Awww."*

Green was the only voice not to laugh. In fact, his distress lapped at Hawks like icy waves. The source of his anxiety bubbled to the surface.

"*The mall incident is this Saturday."*

Hawks swallowed. His hands felt tingly so he rubbed them together, trying to force the feeling back into them. *Yeah. I know.* He took a breath and squared his shoulders. *Think we can convince Miruko and Aizawa to go shopping?*

XXXXXXX

Hawks went home to Miruko's apartment that night, if only because he knew she'd stress out if he didn't. She met him at the door with an unopened beer in her hand. He plucked it from

her fingers and shoved it back into the fridge, giving her a water instead.

"No." he stated.

Miruko's expression twisted. "Hawks, I know my limits—"

"*No*." Hawks repeated vehemently. "You've drunk more in the past week than you have in a year."

"Like you would know that." she muttered.

Hawks stiffened. "Rumi..." He said, forcing his voice to remain steady. "*Please* tell me you didn't drink because I was missing."

Her red eyes met his and shifted to the side. "Not that much."

Hawks blinked rapidly. The thought of his friend being pushed to drinking by his disappearance made him queasy. He breathed through his nose to counter the nausea. "Okay. *Okay*. Since we've got some time, let's talk spying."

Miruko huffed but followed him to the counter. "You're offering to give me spying lessons, Baby Bird?"

"They will help you stay alive." Hawks said, sharper than he meant. He forced his feathers to lay flat and sat across from Miruko. "What is your exact mission?"

"To identify the leaders of the Meta Liberation Army, discover their bases, and bring them down." Her tone was unnervingly flat.

Hawks realized she had also figured out the Commission wouldn't let any of that happen. Not unless it benefited them. "When are you supposed to start?"

"Last week." Miruko said unrepentantly.

Hawks winced. "I bet they're happy about that."

She shrugged. "I wouldn't know. They're just… lurking right now."

"*Stalkers."* Yellow whispered out of obligation.

"It's more proof this mission is unnecessary *bullshit*." Miruko continued.

"You can still refuse." Hawks reminded her.

A rough hand ruffled his hair. "No, I can't." Miruko avoided his irritated flail and leaned back in her chair. "I'd say I have another week or two before the Commission starts sending more threats."

Hawks kept his expression stoic despite the churning of his stomach. The fact that the Commission might forego all pretenses and just kidnap him for use as a hostage— and lab rat

— was a nerve-wracking but definite possibility. He should try to find non-syringey and subtle ways to make them more reassured in their grip over him and hopefully lessen the pressure on Miruko. If they had one Hero doll to play with they might ignore the other.

He thought about his bill and tried to calculate how much he more would be in debt if he borrowed more money from the Commission to pay for an apartment. He didn't know why he bothered. He'd never pay it off regardless.

Maybe he should try to put some distance between himself and Rumi—?

Nah. That would never work. The Commission already had their claws stabbed into her. Besides, if he did try to act angry, she'd see right through it and know what he was trying to do. He and Rumi knew each other too well.

"So what's your thoughts about my chances, Mr. Spy Expert?" Miruko asked sarcastically.

Hawks did not smile. "You're an awful choice as a spy. You show your feelings on your face, you're emotional and easily-angered, you tend to kick things you don't like, you blurt your thoughts, you insult people and love to press their buttons, and you're so well-known they'll likely never trust you."

Miruko hardly blinked at the harsh appraisal of her spying abilities. She knew she wasn't meant for this type of mission. "Then how do I beat my own limitations?"

"Your best chance is to use real thoughts and emotions as your base. They need to see you as valuable or they won't let you in the door. And connections with individuals within the Army will be important. They'll need to trust you. So again, sprinkle in bits of truth." He put on a blank expression to avoid frowning. "Be careful though. Using those methods may make you accidentally reveal information you shouldn't. It might give them an inkling of how you tick, which also gives them a better chance to emotionally and mentally manipulate you if one of them feels inclined." Hawks wrinkled his nose. "You should read their book, too."

He glanced distastefully at said book— which the Commission had 'helpfully' supplied for Miruko— and resisted the urge to blow it up with Orange's Quirk. Blowing up the Commission's 'gift' would not make the mission go away.

"*Are you sure?"* Orange asked flatly. *"Cause blowing up some Commission buildings is sounding like a great idea right now."*

Hawks slipped up and scowled. *Don't joke about that.*

"*Not. Joking."*

Miruko matched Hawks's expression, albeit for different reasons. "It's going to have some content about 'sacrifices for the greater good' that'll make me want to throw it in a volcano, isn't it?"

"You'll have to keep that kind of thinking to yourself." Hawks warned sternly. "Work on your poker face. You can't huff and roll your eyes if you disagree with them. Find parts of the book

you can at least *pretend* to believe in. In case it wasn't clear: aspects of the Meta Liberation Army are more like a cult of fanatics than an organization. They encourage the lower ranks to sacrifice their lives for their cause in *suicide attacks*. There have been rumors they turn people into living bombs. Any slights against the word of Destro is met with violence at best."

"You know, more people might believe in their cause if they didn't act like brainwashed psychos." Miruko muttered.

"Do *not* call them 'brainwashed psychos'." Hawks snapped. He forced himself to calm down. "Think of this instead: Some of them aren't fanatical and legitimately believe in their cause; to make Quirk regulation less strict for the benefits of people."

"So they decided to join a Villain-class terrorist organization that promotes sacrificing your life and the lives of innocents to do it." Miruko growled.

Hawks repressed a wince by glowering. "The devout followers *will* kill you if you say things like this, Rumi."

Miruko's scowl faded away and she slumped. "I *know*. I'm *not trained for this*."

"Heroes with heteromorph Quirks rarely are." Hawks stated. "Our animal traits are too recognizable."

"Which is why I'm approaching the MLA as *me*." Miruko slumped and laid her head in her arms on the countertop, hiding her face. "I'm not taking on an identity. I can't because I'm too recognizable. So when I infiltrate, it's as *Miruko*. They'll know who I am, and I'll have to convince them that I believe in their cause. I *know* how these missions work." She raised her head, and her expression was hollow. "I'll have to do awful things to cement my loyalty to the organization. A *terrorist* organization. If I don't, I'm dead. If I do, I *hurt people*." She reached up and gripped her head, red eyes glassy. "I'll have to *hurt innocent people*."

Hawks walked around the countertop and hugged her, pressing his cheek to the top of her head. "You won't."

"I will if—"

"You *won't*." Hawks repeated. "Because you are one of the most stubborn people I know. If anyone can figure out a way to keep their trust without resorting to hurting innocents, it's you. You're too mulishly stubborn to let them manipulate you. I bet you'd actually turn it on them and get some of them to realize they're going too far."

She chuckled humorlessly. "You have more faith in me then I do."

"Well, you're encouraging like that with me." Hawks said, deceptively light. "It's only fair I throw your boundless belief back at you." He returned to his chair and propped his elbow on the countertop, leaning on his hand. "We need to figure out distress codes."

"Not here." Miruko said firmly.

"No duh." Hawks replied sarcastically.

It hit him just how much Miruko did not know about her new 'profession' and panic expanded in his chest like something had taken hold of his heart and twisted it. He tried to still his shaking hands by gripping his pant legs.

"I know some people who can teach you more efficiently than me."

Miruko shot him a furious look. "I won't—"

"They're not Commission. It's a friend of… our friend." He dare not speak Katniss's name here.

Miruko relaxed. To be honest, it stung that she had assumed he'd let the Commission anywhere near her for this. He'd never let *anyone* go to the Commission for training after what they had done to him.

Miruko doesn't have enhanced interrogation training.

Flashes of his future self's fate plagued his mind. Hawks's hands were shaking rather badly. And his skin felt cold. And his breathing was fast.

He pushed through it. *That won't happen to Rumi.*

"*We might be able to assist her as Ennea."* Green said abruptly. *"A Vigilante outside the law can have access to missions and info Heroes legally couldn't."*

Can Ennea give us evidence that could take down the Meta Liberation Army ***right now****?*

"*...No."* Green said with clear reluctance. *"But we know where their base is. It will take a lot of planning— the whole city is MLA— but we might be able to find something if we infiltrate it."*

Hawks could only accept his word.

Miruko peeked at a page in the middle of Destro's book and scowled. He took the book from her before she could rip it and flipped to the chapter about the rights people should have to use their Quirks for self-defense. He turned the book around and pointed at a passage.

"There. You at least agree with this, right?"

To his relief, she actually read the page. She did not look any happier.

"Yeah." Miruko snarled. "I agree that Quirk usage shouldn't be so restricted. Except for the part right *after* that where '*The only path to true freedom is to completely destroy all that seek to oppress our true selves. The status quo must be burned in order for a free world to rise from its ashes. Although feeble cowards shall protest the act of war, 'innocent' blood must be spilled for the world to change. 'Innocent' for there are no innocents in war. All those that accept the corruption of our laws are as guilty as those that enforce them.*'" She slammed the

book shut. "Cult-ass bitc— Oh, do *excuse me*…" She cleared her throat loudly and pointedly. "I meant to say so-called 'Freedom fighting'-ass *bitches*."

Hawks stared at her tiredly and resisted the urge to screech at her or put his head in his hands. He knew she understood subtlety and how not to anger people. However, her instinct was to be unsubtle and speak without a filter. That was fine in most places but not when infiltrating a political minefield of an organization that would happily shoot her in the head for saying something rude.

Miruko noticed his tired glower and took a breath before smirking mockingly. Whether it was at herself or the book, Hawks could not say.

"At least I'm not joining the League." she joked.

Pink and Yellow disconnected themselves from Hawks like their lives depended on it. Hawks gripped his hands together so tightly he could feel his nails digging into his palms.

"*Ha*." he choked as he did *not* think about missing wings and blood and torture and turning to dust—

Miruko shot him a confused stare but he avoided her gaze. She looked down at the counter and Hawks recognized the expression she wore when she was debating whether to do something. He let her think as he sorted his own thoughts and tried to figure out how to make sure she did not insult an important MLA Commander and get assassinated.

"I found that thing you had." Miruko said abruptly. She paused and made a shooting motion with her hand. "You know, hidden in your stuff?"

Hawks heard her, but what she said failed to mean anything. He stared at her uncomprehendingly until Red gasped and he remembered the gun she had created.

He hadn't gotten rid of it. It was still hidden in his boxes of clothes.

I'm such an ***idiot****.*

"It's not what you think." he said hastily, which was probably the stupidest response he could give. Yet Miruko expected *him* to teach her not to mess up and say stupid things? What a *joke*.

Miruko gave him a neutral look that was so unlike her that he had to fight the instinct to freeze and brace himself for a blow. "And *what* do I 'think'?"

Hawks avoided looking at her, trying to think of a logical explanation.

"I'm so sorry!" Red apologized.

It's okay. We all forgot. Hawks forced a laugh. "Um… I'm going to be in the next *Space Saga* movie and that's a prop? Surprise?"

Miruko's ears flicked down and she crossed her arms.

Hawks chuckled nervously. "I don't know what to say."

"How about where you got it and maybe why." Miruko said flatly.

Hawks winced. "Funny story…"

Miruko sighed.

It was a tired, disappointed sound that sent a disproportional burst of panic through Hawks's veins. Okay, she was upset so how could he calm her down maybe a joke but she'd already gotten annoyed at the last one so that wouldn't work so maybe he should just suck it up and let her yell at him—

A hand landed on Hawks's head and he stilled. Miruko was scowling but she ruffled his hair gently, not pulling the locks or using it as a grip to slam Hawks's head into anything.

"You're doing that thing again."

Hawks did not reply.

Miruko's jaw clenched with a soft cracking sound. "Not even a *peep* of protest. I really freaked you out, huh? Sorry, Baby Bird."

"You didn't do anything wrong." Hawks denied.

Miruko hummed vaguely. Her red eyes were sharp. "It has something to do with your other Quirks, doesn't it?"

Hawks went still. Even his feathers were rigid, his wings pressed against his back.

"Shit, she knows." Yellow moaned.

"I'm not a Nomu." Hawks blurted.

Miruko frowned. "Hawks—"

"I *swear* I'm not." Hawks interrupted, pretending his voice did not sound close to hysteria. "I-I don't have proof but I'm not a sleeper or anything!"

"Hawks, I—"

"I can't explain it exactly because you have that mission and it'd be dangerous for you to know because others could find out and know." he pleaded. "But I— I swear I'm not hiding anything maliciously I trust you really I do I just wasn't sure how to tell you that this happened because I didn't want you to be mad and I know I kept it secret for selfish reasons and I'm an awful, stupid hypocrite but I didn't mean to—"

"*Hawks*." Miruko interrupted loudly.

Hawks's rambling stuttered to a halt. Miruko's hand lifted like she was going to reach for him but it fell to her side without touching him.

"I don't care."

Hawks heard the words but they failed to make sense in his jumbled mind. "What?"

Miruko rolled her eyes. "You don't have to tell me anything if you don't want to."

Hawks stared at her in nervous disbelief. "But… you mentioned it?"

Miruko blew a lock of white hair out of her face. "Yeah. But that doesn't mean you *owe* me an explanation." She huffed and dragged a hand over her face. "Dammit, I messed this up. I just wanted you to know I found it and hid it…" She glanced at the walls. "…somewhere else so you didn't freak and think it got stolen. I'm not mad at you for keeping things to yourself."

Hawks chuckled uncomfortably and tried not to fidget. "I knew that." His hands stilled, fingers twitching nervously, and he hid them in his lap. "You really don't want to know?"

"I do." Miruko admitted. "But I'm not gonna force anything outta you. And for the record, I know you're not a Nomu or sleeper or traitor or anything."

She had no proof except his word but she meant it. He knew she burned with curiosity but she *meant it* when she said she would not invade his privacy. She meant it when she said she believed him.

The smile Hawks gave her was real. "You're too nice, Rumi." *I don't deserve that.*

She groaned and flopped dramatically down on the countertop. "*Noooooo*. Don't ruin my bitchy image!"

"You're ruining it yourself." Hawks teased.

He listened to her grumble and stared absently ahead, focused on his mental notes on how to keep this wonderful, amazing, understanding person *alive*—

He blinked and Miruko's worried face was inches from his. She drew back.

"You drifted."

Hawks's heart sank. *How long?*

"Out loud." she said quietly.

Hawks put his head in his hands. "I can handle this. I'm *fine*."

"You're shaking." Miruko noted. "And you look like a raccoon. When's the last time you slept?"

Hawks squinted. "Um..." *Any help, guys?*

"*Last Monday you got a couple hours."* Purple supplied and Silver gave a horrified spluttering sound.

"Last Monday." Hawks parroted.

"That was more than a *week* ago."

"I know. But we are not making this about me." Hawks said sharply.

Miruko gave him her most unimpressed glare. "Go to bed, Baby Bird."

"We're in the middle of a conversation."

"You're in the middle of a *nervous breakdown*."

She grasped his hand and pried it open, revealing deep gouges in his palms. And blood. He hadn't even noticed the pain. Miruko left the table and came back with some peroxide and some cotton swabs. She wiped away the speckles of blood.

"I always forget how sharp your nails are."

"That's why I keep them short. Domesticated birds aren't supposed to have talons, apparently." Hawks quipped, though it came out breathy. His chest felt tight and his shoulders were stiff all the way down into his arms.

"This is why I didn't want to tell you, you know." Miruko murmured. "Part of it, anyway."

"You don't have to protect me." Hawks said.

Green stirred but kept his thoughts to himself.

"Well, I want to." Miruko stated. She finished bandaging his hands and picked up the supplies. "Try to sleep. We can talk when you're not running on fumes."

Hawks opened his mouth to protest but she'd already left. He stared unhappily at the doorway before grabbing a notebook. He opened it and began writing instructions, all in code.

"You should sleep."

I can sleep later, Green.

"This is not healthy." Silver lectured.

Not you too.

*"Even **I** think you're pushing it.*" Purple added.

I'm not going to waste time sleeping, Hawks snapped.

"Oh, so you can 'waste time' freaking out instead?" Orange sneered. *"How does that help anyone?"*

Hawks repressed a flinch. *I'm **fine**.*

"Hawks, breathe with me." Green said suddenly.

Huh?

Hawks looked at the page he'd been writing on. The words were blurry and his ribs pressed against his lungs, squeezing. He laid his head on the counter and struggled to draw in breath.

If Rumi dies, it'll be my fault.

"No it won't—"

***Yes, it will be.** She's taking this mission to protect **me**. The Commission knows about our Quirks. I bet they're just pretending to keep their word and are planning to lock me up whenever they choose. And the mission they're making Rumi do has her infiltrate part of the group that **tortured and killed** future me, in case you forgot. Plus there's the serial killer who's already murdered five people. It'll make the news soon and with our luck the Commission will hint I'm not working fast enough. Then there's all the other cases the Commission gave me, **none** of which I am completing. The Commission, that I accidentally told my **intern** about. My damn teenaged intern now has a **target** on him and he doesn't even know it! And then there's Saturday. If we fail, we lose our best chance to arrest Shigaraki with minimal risk and casualties. I could get Midoriya killed. I could get a bunch of people **killed** if All For One decides to send **Nomu** to help his apprentice.* Blue eyes flashed through his mind and Orange tensed. *Not to mention Kaetsu is still out there…*

Hawks glanced out the window, all too aware the Heroes previously standing watch had been called away to different missions. He laid his head back down.

I can't do this.

"Yes you can." Pink said fiercely. *"That's just your exhaustion talking. Yes, it's a lot to deal with but you're going to be okay."*

Hawks shook his head back and forth as his vision went grey.

*"Gold, **stop**!"* Red shouted.

Hawks blinked and saw feathers in his hands. A few of the tips had blood. Where had it come from? He dropped them in the trash and rocked back and forth, gripping his elbows.

"I feel dizzy." White slurred.

"Go to Rumi." Green said sharply.

*I can't. She's already done too much I can't make her deal with me I'm already going to cause her death **I can't** —*

*"She won't mind. **Go**."*

Hawks stumbled out of the room to Miruko's. He hit the doorjam instead of entering the room and went down with a *thud*. Miruko bolted upright, ears ramrod straight. She shoved her blankets off and rushed to his side.

"Hawks?"

He tried to speak but no sound came out.

She swore. "I shouldn't have left you."

Miruko pulled him over to the bed and guided him onto it, sitting next to him. He immediately curled up against her side and gripped her arm. For some reason, his fingers would not unbend no matter how much he tried. He tried to let go he tried he tried he *tried* because *he wasn't supposed to seek comfort*.

As the hours passed, Hawks's anxiety did not fade, even as his body decided it was getting too tired to keep his heart beating so frantically and slowed it down, leaving him exhausted and cold. Miruko stayed up with him the whole time, never scolding him or demanding he release her arm, instead petting his hair in a rhythmic, soothing motion. She was going to be exhausted in the morning. Again. Because of him.

I'm a burden on her, Hawks realized.

The voices might have said something but they were lost in the static.

Hawks's throat and chest felt tight and his eyes burned but he did not cry. He still hid his face in Miruko's shoulder even though he knew he shouldn't. She did not push him away.

He almost wished she did.

I'm sorry.

XXXXXXX

Mockingjay was in the middle of a stakeout when the phone in her pocket buzzed. It was one of her many burner phones so she immediately turned her gaze away from the building she was scouting to check it. It was a message from 'Berubetto'.

'*Hey, Kuwai! I know you're working reeaallly hard on our group project but with the new job and my public speaking class, life is just killing me right now. The teacher is being a bitch and added debates to the curriculum. Debates! Who's going to use that stupid stuff in the real world other than politicians? Me, apparently! I may be procrastinating on it a bit but I'm so busy I can't even help my brother with his homework. Could you keep working on the final project without me? It's just until I have time to breathe. I swear I'll make it up to you!'*

Mockingjay read the message again and closed her eyes. *Why do I always have to care about self-sacrificing idiots?*

She sent a message to 'Berubetto' that she was more than happy to keep researching on her own and settled back to continue her observation. So Miruko was going through with her

mission to infiltrate the Meta Liberation Army then. At least, she was willing to once she could no longer delay it without the Commission deciding to go through with their threats. Hawks could not be happy about that. Hell, Mockingjay was not happy about it.

But if Miruko thought she could hold off or distract the Commission with 'compliance' to give them more time to prepare, Mockingjay would trust her to. Miruko was not dumb. She knew the Commission wanted her to give up her life or give up Hawks's. And until they had a plan to push one of the hostages to safety without the other being taken out, they had to play along.

Mockingjay could only hope they had enough to free them both before Miruko was pulled too deep in her sham of a suicide mission. If not, then she had no qualms about burning it all down. She had done it before and she would do it again.

So Mockingjay perched far from the Detnerat building as Beetee chattered in her ear and sliced through their security, carefully extracting what intel he could find.

Miruko and Hawks would *not* end up like Finnick and Prim, dead before thirty because a Hero organization saw them as disposable.

She would make sure of it.

XXXXXXX

Hawks either passed out or fell asleep. He must have because when awareness returned he felt groggy. His body felt heavy, as if he had been sleeping for far too long. He tried to shift but it was as if his limbs were made of lead.

Something felt… wrong. He could not say what, though the answer lingered at the edge of his consciousness.

After some struggle, Hawks's eyes cracked open. Bright light burned into his retinas and he winced, raising a hand to cover his face. He tried to anyway. Tried, because he could not lift his arms.

Hawks snapped into alertness and saw white. White ceiling, white walls, white lamp above him. He tried to lift his head but there was a strap across it, keeping him pinned. His gaze swept around his surroundings, taking them in, and his heart turned to ice.

There was no denying it.

He was in some type of lab.

Hawks stopped trying to break free and laid his head on what was likely a dissection table, struggling to calm his breathing. Had the Commission lost patience and simply taken him from the apartment? If they had, was Rumi okay?

Guys, what happened?

Silence.

None of the voices answered him.

Not even a *whisper*.

It was if they never existed in the first place.

Hawks's heart ran a marathon in his chest but he forced himself to stay as calm as possible. The voices had probably sealed themselves off again like they had the last time the Commission had him. That was a good thing. He did not want them to suffer too.

Hawks began mentally preparing himself for whatever was coming, forcing himself to remain logical and detached as he reassured himself that he would not be killed or permanently damaged. He shifted as much as he could in a futile attempt to get comfortable and noticed his back was flat against the cold table.

In a snap, he finally realized what felt wrong.

His wings were gone.

His wings were *gone*.

Hawks choked on a scream. He knew screaming would only draw the attention of his captors so he stifled it by biting his tongue. There was no time to panic. He had to get out. Who knew what awful things the Commission would make Miruko do in exchange for his 'safety'.

Hawks listened carefully as he inspected the bindings with his hands and ankles, feeling the material as best he could. If he dislocated his thumbs he might be able to get his hands through. Before he could try, he heard footsteps approaching. A shudder passed through him but he schooled his expression. Showing fear would not stop them. In fact, it would just make things worse.

Hawks focused on Miruko and how she'd pay if he disappointed the Commission. It helped him relax, as did the realization that he wasn't in pain, so maybe his wings weren't permanently shorn from his back. The Commission *had* cut part of his wing off before to see if it regenerated from the damage— it had, though it took a while— so maybe they left some wing bone that he wasn't noticing.

Although since he wasn't hurting, the Commission had probably used a Quirk to temporarily remove them while they… worked. They would not want to damage them, after all. Damaged wings took time to regenerate, time he could be using to work.

Any calm he grasped slipped into the void as his captor walked in. He had never seen him before— not even in the voices' memories— but he recognized him on sight. It would be difficult not to, with all the wires and scars on his face.

"How *interesting*." All For One said.

The Villain leaned over Hawks and the skin where his eyes once were split apart, revealing cold eyes. All For One grinned down at him, lips stretching so much the tubes warped his features.

"*Very* interesting." he repeated. "I've been waiting a long time to meet you, *Hero*."

Hawks wondered why the hell All For One would be interested in him but realized what must be happening. He was experiencing someone else's memory again. Likely Green's.

All For One's twisted smile widened. "I never expected a gnat like yourself to be worthy of my attention, but here we are. You should be proud."

Hawks kept silent. If this was Green's memory, all he could do was wait it out. Green was okay— mostly— so he'd be rescued or escape before things went too far. It was weird that Hawks was aware these weren't his memories though. Usually he lost track of himself.

All For One leaned close to his face and he smelled sickness and decay on his breath. A deceptively gentle hand pressed against Hawks's forehead, just enough to be uncomfortable.

"How curious. Even now, when you're helpless and afraid, you can hide things from me. Who are you protecting?"

No one, Hawks thought even though this was a memory and was not real.

All For One chuckled. It was an awful sound, like the rasp of a dying man more than a laugh. "You don't even realize what you've done. Or what's happened to you."

The hand on Hawks's head moved and he repressed a flinch, reminding himself this was not real. All For One brushed his hair back almost like Miruko did. But while Rumi's touch calmed him, Hawks's heartbeat quickened until he could feel it pounding in his chest and throat.

But he would be fine. Green still had his Quirk, and this was not real.

All For One hummed thoughtfully, almost sounding impressed. "I cannot take your Quirk." he noted. "Is it because I am attempting to use my Quirk through this one, or because of something inside *you?*"

Hawks's heart crawled into his throat.

"I've been watching you *very* carefully. I know your body adapted to having multiple Quirks. True, there are a few issues but you're mostly stable. Why, if I did not know better, I may think you were merely mine or my brother's descendant." All For One mused. "However, I *do* know better, unfortunately for you and All Might. So tell me…" He grasped Hawks's chin, forcing him to look at him. "When did he choose you as his successor for One For All?"

Confusion warred with Hawks's unease before he remembered this was Green's memory. He kept silent.

"And here I thought he'd predictably choose that student from UA." All For One sighed. "I suppose he does have some intelligence in that hero-addled brain of his. Why, I never would have looked into you if not for the interest of one of my subordinates. You were hidden in plain sight; Barely trained in One For All's use and away from Toshinori's protection."

Before Hawks could do more than wonder how Toshinori was connected to this, All For One calmly reached for him and large hands wrapped around his throat.

"I'm not normally so brutal," All For One said in the disinterested tone of someone who most certainly was. "But for you, I'll make an exception. Don't worry; you'll only *feel* like you're dying. You'll wake up safely in bed. I don't want you to die yet. After all, you've done something none of your predecessors have managed to. And my doctor would *love* to see you. Perhaps I should schedule an appointment."

His hand slowly tightened. Hawks tried to struggle but he was pinned, strapped to a table like he was already in Ujiko's tender care. His vision blurred and he felt his neck creaking beneath the pressure. But it *wasn't* real. It was *Green's* memory.

Then how did Green survive?

Panic tore through Hawks but before he could scream, something slammed into him with the force of a bullet train and his vision went green.

"*LEAVE HIM ALONE!*"

The lab around Hawks *shattered* like a broken mirror as everything vanished in glowing green light. The last thing he saw was All For One's shocked expression morph into a smile.

His eyes fluttered open and he squinted at an unfamiliar ceiling. Before he could panic, Ochaco Uraraka leaned over him, eyes wide with shock. Except… she looked older?

"Holy shit."

Hawks's jolted upright and locked eyes with Denki Kaminari. An *adult* Denki Kaminari.

Hawks gaped at him before forcing his gaze around his new surroundings. He was in UA's new dorms. Along with Uraraka and Kaminari— Pink and Yellow— he saw Tenya Iida, Izuku Midoriya, Shoto Todoroki, Hitoshi Shinso, and two humanoid figures made of light.

One was red and clearly female. Occasionally the red light would flicker and Hawks thought he saw a glimpse of dark hair. The other was certainly male, composed completely of a steady orange glow. Hawks could not see their features, but could tell the red one had a long, spiky ponytail and the orange one had a hair cut short around the back with longer, messy hair up to the top.

He did not have much time to inspect them further before Orange spoke.

"How the *fuck*, Green?"

"Language." Tenya Iida—*Silver*— snapped.

"How the *fucketh*, Green?*"* Orange said instantly.

"How? Gold here? Here now? How?!" Yellow spluttered.

"I don't know!" Izuku Midoriya— *Green*— squeaked. "He was in pain and scared and I just did it!"

Hawks opened his mouth, shut it, and closed his eyes.

After a few seconds he blinked a few times and was still in the UA dorms in his head.

He tried to voice his own 'How the *hell*, Green.' but only a croak came out. Although he had not really been strangled, his body seemed to think he was. *Was* this his body? No, it wasn't. It was a mind construct thingy… in the mind construct thingy in his head.

As if his situation wasn't weird enough already.

*How the **hell**, Green?*

"We can still hear your thoughts." Green whispered, stunned. "But apparently you can't hear ours here?"

Hawks stared uncomprehendingly at him.

"Are you alright?" Shoto Todoroki— White— blurted. "We saw your nightmare but we could not wake you up until Green did… whatever he did."

A shudder passed through Hawks but he smiled. *I'm okay. It was another memory, right?*

Green looked distinctly uncomfortable, shifting from side to side. Hawks noticed his cheeks were still dotted with freckles. It was so *weird* to be able to see him. "Er, no. I was never captured by All For One." As Hawks's skin drained of color, he hurried to continue. "But he *doesn't* have a mind-walking Quirk."

Hawks wasn't so sure about that. It felt so *real*. Like the Villain had manifested himself into his nightmares or something…

"I swear All For One doesn't have any abilities like that.″ Green reassured him.

Hawks's breathing evened out. *Okay. Mundane nightmare it was then.*

"After the week we've had, I'm not surprised." Pink sighed.

Hawks blinked at her, gaze zeroing in on the small scar by her right eye. He didn't know she had a scar. How had she gotten it? He didn't ask.

This was so *weird*.

"It was some nightmare." Yellow breathed. "We couldn't get in at all. I *swear* you were blocking us."

Silver scowled and glared at Yellow sternly. He blinked in confusion at the tall, glowering man—*Looks like Tenya had another big growth spurt.*— and twitched, yellow eyes widening in horror as his hands waved frantically.

"Not that we blame you!"

Hawks glanced at him uncertainly but let it go. *No offense but how do I get out?*

"Sick of us already?" Hitoshi Shinso—Purple. Holy crap Hawks was finally *seeing* those kids' *future selves*.— asked dryly.

No. But my body's probably unresponsive right now. I don't want Rumi to think I'm catatonic again. We could get sent to the hospital.

More than one voice—*future Hero*— winced.

I can come back later, Hawks continued. *That is, if Green can do a Green again.*

"What's that supposed to mean?" Green asked nervously.

"It mean you're so heroic you break mind physics and shit." Orange said dismissively.

A slow smile stretched across Green's freckled face.

"That's *not* a compliment you damn nerd!"

Hawks stifled a laugh as Orange lunged for Green, who yelped and fled across the room. As much as he wanted to stick around and watch the show, he had no idea what was happening outside. For all he knew, medics might be using a defibrillator on him. He opened the door and eyed the black abyss outside, taking a readying breath.

"Wait!" Pink called.

She whispered something to Yellow and Silver and they all hurried to Hawks's side. Before he could ask, he found himself trapped in a group hug. Hawks blinked in confusion and looked to the first person in his line of sight for an explanation, who just happened to be White.

Rather than explain, White wandered over like he had just so happened to decide to go this way and solemnly joined the hug. Hawks's confused thoughts must have transferred because Pink pulled away.

"We promised we'd figure out how to hug you, remember?"

A hesitant smile stretched across Hawks's face. *Thank you.*

"Ugh." Orange groaned. "You're all so mushy."

Hawks stared at him and smiled sweetly.

Orange tensed. "Don't you fucking *dare*—"

Hawks dashed over to him and caught him in a brief embrace before bolting for the exit.

Orange's cursing followed him as he traveled through darkness, feeling less like he was walking and more like he was being pulled forward.

He blinked and recognized Miruko's ceiling. He turned his head to see she was asleep. She hadn't noticed his… in-head visit. Good.

"Are you going to be okay or are we gonna have another anxiety attack?" White asked.

"Tact, White." Green sighed.

"My apologies."

It's okay. You have a point. But anxiety attacks aren't something you can really predict—

Hawks paused as he realized what he said.

He laid on his back and stared hollowly at the dark ceiling. *I really do have PTSD and stuff, huh?*

"Yeah." Green said softly. *"I think most of us do."*

Even Orange did not object.

Hawks shut his eyes. *I'm sorr—* He stopped and exhaled slowly. *The Commission is already happy with me. This is going to please them sooo much more.*

"*I do not intend to be cruel but they will not be—"* White paused. *"Oh, I understand."*

"I'm serious about kicking their asses." Orange stated.

"I agree. We won't let them hurt you anymore." Green said calmly.

Hawks felt a trickle of unease at the latter's words. *Green—*

*" **No**. This has gone on long enough. Now they're **threatening** you— and by extension, all of us— to get Rumi killed. Something must be done."*

Hawks's mouth went dry. *They're a pillar of Hero Society*, he reminded them a tad nervously. *We can't do anything without causing chaos.*

"Then maybe we need a little 'chaos' to save the world." Silver said levelly.

Hawks could picture his eyes glinting behind his glasses. His unease tripled and his breath caught in his chest.

That sounds very close to Villainy.

"It's not." Green said. *"We can stay within the law, except for Ennea, of course."* He paused, gauging how he might react, but pushed on. *"Gold, with the Commission in power, it will be too easy for Villains like the League and Meta Liberation Army to cause everything to*

*collapse. Hero Society **can't** stay as it is for it to survive. Things have to change. And we **will** change them. Legally."*

That was wrong. Green was wrong. He was wrong wrong wrong *wrong*—

Hawks swallowed and kept his thoughts to himself. *What are you planning?*

"Nothing yet." Green said evasively. *"But Gold… the Commission is our en—… an obstacle as much as the Villains. They'll kill Heroes like Rumi and forcibly take kids like Eri in the name of 'peace' and everyone ignorantly applauds them. They shouldn't be able to do that."*

Hawks almost wished Green was the manipulative type. Then he could hesitate instead of agreeing—

Oh. No no no *he didn't mean that*. He wasn't agreeing. He *wasn't*. He... Oh, who was he fooling? What was he *thinking*? What was *wrong* with him? The Commission did so much for him and Hero Society but he was wondering if they were bad? *He* was the bad one. He was so ungrateful and selfish and stupid. How could he think of the Commission like that after they did so much for him and Hero Society? They gave him chance after chance even though he was a mistake, and they saved so many people. How could he ever forget that? He knew how; because he was a selfish hypocrite. Did good Heroes need to remind themselves they were supposed to be a good person? *No*, they didn't.

Hawks blinked rapidly because his vision was blurry and tinted grey for some reason. He hoped he did not drift again. It didn't feel like he was drifting. His chest was too tight and his breathing was too fast and his hands were shaking.

Green's alarm and guilt just made it harder to keep himself under control because good Heroes did *not* cry. *"Gold, you—"*

"*Green. Enough."* White said sharply.

"*But I—"*

"***Green**."*

Green went silent.

The voices allowed Hawks a moment to keep himself together, politely ignoring his shame at acting like this. And now he was whining like a miserable brat *again*—

"Hey." Pink soothed. *"Let's just focus on one goal at a time."*

Saturday, Hawks thought, clinging to the not-bad, undeniably *heroic* goal with a pathetic amount of desperation.

"Saturday." Pink agreed. *"Let's plan for that first."*

Hawks spent the rest of the night laying awake as they planned how to hopefully remove a dangerous enemy from the board. Hours later, he still felt echoes of All For One's hands

around his throat.

Just a nightmare, he reminded himself. *Just a nightmare.*

That was all it was. A nightmare from stress and anxiety about the future, where their next choices could ruin absolutely everything.

But it would be fine.

Everything would turn out okay.

It would all be okay.

Change the Future

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His arm was gone.

His arm was *gone*.

Hawks stared at the bleeding stump, too stunned to scream, and was backhanded into concrete. Before he could rise, a giant hand grabbed his hair and yanked him upward. He struggled, clawing at the fingers wrapped around his skull with his remaining hand as his vision blackened.

Someone was screaming.

He had to fight—

He *had to*—

Don't pass out don't pass out. Pass out and ***we're both dead****—*

The Nomu lifted Hawks up to its face and familiar, sunken blue eyes stared out at him, glassy and unfocused. *Dead*. Lingering strands of yellow hair clung feebly to the blackened head, which looked more like a caved-in animal's skull than that of a person. They surrounded the exposed brain of the creature like a warped, bloody halo.

The Nomu was *smiling*. It's smile was so wide it may have appeared genuine if not for the frozen nature of its grin. Hawks wondered if Shigaraki did that on purpose, just to mock them with their failure.

A blur of green hit the Nomu but it may as well be a bird flying into a mountain. Of course it was Deku, the *idiot*. Instead of using all his power to blast the Nomu to bits, he was wasting time pleading with it. What did he think he was he *doing—?* The Nomu did not seem to even notice the green-suited Hero attacking it, screaming all the while to "Let him go! All Might, please! *Let him go!*"

The Nomu paid him no mind, focused on slowly tightening its grip on its victim.
Slowly, *sadistically*, because Shigaraki wanted them to suffer as much as possible before they died. Tears filled Hawks eyes, but not from fear. *Never* from fear.

He knew All Might was gone.

He knew it even if Deku did not.

Deku, who pleaded with All Might to stop even as his beloved Hero backhanded him through a wall and knocked him unconscious. The Quirks that bastard of a doctor had pumped into the former Symbol of Peace had warped him beyond saving. Shigaraki had done what he set

out to do— turned All Might's smile into a thing of fear— and there was nothing he or Deku could do about it.

They couldn't save All Might.

But they couldn't die here.

He knew the Nomu's orders. Everyone did. They'd heard them from Shigaraki's bloodstained mouth as he hijacked the news to show off his creation.

"*Kill every non-Villain you see."*

Shigaraki had given that order on the edge of Mustafu and set his creation loose.

By the time the Heroes mobilized— mere minutes after Shigaraki's message— All Might's Nomu had already torn apart more people than he could count. Young, old, Hero or civilian; all of them were stalked without mercy, too slow or too weak or too terrified to escape the 'new and improved' Symbol of Peace.

People did escape, fleeing from Mustafu as a city-wide evacuation was ordered but the Nomu kept going, always moving, never resting, killing like the single, unstoppable recipient of a desire to wipe out humanity as a whole. Everywhere the Nomu went, he smiled and laughed like a distorted mockery of the person it was, saying the only phrase that Shigaraki let it.

"*I AM HERE!*

Once a phrase of hope and relief, now its utterance brought nothing but fear.

He and Deku realized he would never stop until he was *stopped*.

And they knew they had to be the ones to do it.

They'd decided it, they accepted it, because they were the ones meant to carry on All Might's slowly-crumbling legacy.

But now, All Might would kill him, then Deku, then more and more innocents.

Death after death after death until some lucky bastard brought him down.

He couldn't let this Nomu kill more people.

He couldn't let it kill his friend.

So he lifted his remaining hand and pressed it against All Might's ruined face—

Bzzzz.

Bzzzz.

Bzzzz.

Hawks opened blurry eyes and stifled a scream, flailing in the dark until his hand came into contact with his phone. He got a glimpse of the time— 2:30— before seeing the number and immediately answered.

"What's wrong?"

"*Is that always your normal greeting?"* Aizawa asked, sounding as awake as he usually did despite the hour.

In other words, he sounded as exhausted as Hawks felt. Naturally the nocturnal Hero had to call Hawks the one time he managed to sleep, though he should be grateful he'd been woken. He felt a giant hand squeezing his skull and repressed a flinch.

"Maybe." He got up and started putting on his shoes. "And that didn't answer my—"

What if this is about Tokoyami or Eri?

Hawks was only stopped from flying out the window by Aizawa's next words.

"*Everything's fine. I simply wanted you to clarify something."*

Hawks heard the crinkle of paper and realized Aizawa must be looking at his notes as some late-night reading. How the man didn't get nightmares was beyond him. Or maybe he already did, so what was a few more? Hawks switched his phone to his other ear and rubbed his left bicep, rocking back and forth as he tried to figure out how to tell Aizawa about the danger Tokoyami was in. *And* the UA traitor. And—

"I'm not sure I can right now." Hawks said, glancing around Miruko's apartment. "And couldn't it wait until morning?"

"*No. I'm looking at your notes on the League and I have a couple questions about the portal Villain, Kurogiri."*

Panic tore through the voices.

"*He can't know."* Green gasped.

Hawks jumped, startled by the unexpected exclamation. *Know what?*

He got the impression of Green shaking his head. *"Don't mention our reaction. We'll deal with this after we capture Shigaraki."*

Hawks glanced around anxiously again. "Well, ask away and I can tell you later."

"*Why not n— Oh."* Aizawa paused. *"I forgot about your… observers."*

Hawks's lips twitched. "How long has it been since you last slept?"

"*Hmph."*

"A while, then." He grabbed a feather and twirled it between his fingertips. "Can you give me any hints what caught your eye?"

"*Nothing in particular."* Aizawa murmured. *"Just the way you described Kurogiri's abilities seemed… familiar. He has multiple Quirks mashed together? Like a Nomu?"*

The voices shuddered.

Hawks repressed a wince. "In a way."

"*I see."* Aizawa sounded more confused than disturbed, as if two puzzle pieces he'd been staring at were not fitting together. *"Well, I apologize for waking you."*

"Eh, it's fine. You should get to sleep."

"*You are a hypocrite."*

"Says you, Hypocrite-sensei."

Aizawa muttered something uncomplimentary and hung up.

Hawks slowly set his phone down and leaned back, staring blankly at the ceiling.

…Orange?

"*Fuck off."*

Hawks shivered, still feeling the Nomu's crushing grip on his head, and grasped his left arm — still there. *It **won't** happen. Orange, we won't let—*

"***SHUT UP!**"*

Orange tried and failed to retreat as the walls denied him any type of privacy, leaving his emotions bitterly exposed. Fury, helplessness, and sorrow tore through Hawks and he curled up, choking on air. Green's grief only made it worse, so potent even the other voices' emotions were drowned in it. Hawks choked on Green's unshod tears.

"*Kaa— Orange, back then I thought you were talking about Dark Shadow and the forest…"*

"*Well 'the forest' eventually led to that, didn't it, **Deku**?"*

Orange snarled the nickname like the insult it once was, with anger and hatred and vitriol. Except he could not hide the pain behind it, the regrets he could not mask and in no way wanted to share. Hawks's vision was blurry and he realized it was not because of Green anymore.

"*I told you I killed All Might."*

Orange retreated into his room and did not emerge for the rest of the night.

XXXXXXX

The day of the mall incident arrived.

Hawks worked his acting skills to the limit to keep some facade of calm. The voices were not making it any easier. They all— for lack of a better word— feared what may happen today.

They could arrest Shigaraki with little issue and prepare for a counterattack from the blooming League of Villains, they could fail and get people a bunch of people killed, or they could arrest him and draw the *immediate* ire of the Villain that All Might himself could hardly beat. It did not ease his nerves any that Green could not remember where exactly he had run into Shigaraki, which may prevent them from finding him before the Villain reached young Izuku Midoriya.

At least Aizawa should help minimize the risk of casualties. While Miruko was ignorant to their true mission, Aizawa was completely in the know.

Hawks still had trouble believing the Underground Hero had such a quick change of heart and the fear that he was being tricked haunted his nightmares. If Orange gruffly reassured him he was not locked away when he woke with a plea to be let go on his lips a few times this past week, no one mentioned it during the day. Orange's own problems went similarly unaddressed, mostly because Orange outright *refused* to talk about them.

Despite the lingering discomfort, Hawks found some relief when Aizawa arrived to pick him and Miruko up before two. Hawks had bluffed and said he badgered Aizawa into going on a shopping trip after seeing an atrocious outfit he wanted to put Eri in. It wasn't a complete lie. Eri needed clothes and Aizawa needed fashion advice.

He could only hope that Miruko would not end up distracted by adorable child clothes when they needed her. Though Hawks had the feeling she thought he was trying to distract *her* from her mission. Well, he *was*, but that wasn't his main goal today.

"So you know the plan?" Green asked as they got into the car.

Obviously Hawks did but he didn't blame him for asking. Honestly, Hawks could use the reassurance too. *Yes.*

"And you know the plan if the first one doesn't work?"

Yes.

"And the ones if Shigaraki has allies nearby?"

Yes .

Green took a shuddering breath. *"Sorry. We just have so much to lose today.*"

I know, Hawks acknowledged while ignoring the queasy feeling in his stomach. *But we'll have Rumi with us. And Eraserhead will be lurking nearby. He can stop Shigaraki from using his Quirk.*

"I know." Green echoed. *"But what will Kurogiri and All For One do? What if they teleport a horde of Nomu into the mall?"*

"Then Hawks will do his feather schtick and get them out of the way." Orange said bluntly. *"Stop worrying so much, nerd. It's annoying."*

None of them confronted him on his hypocrisy since he was worrying just as much, releasing flashing memories of public streets filled with bodies from the All Might Nomu's rampage.

***Not** thinking about that.* Hawks looked out the window and saw they were pulling up to the mall. *If the worst comes to pass, who should take control?*

"Red or White." Pink said instantly. *"They're our best long-distance fighters."*

"As in they'll blow Shigaraki's fucking head off." Orange growled.

"*Perhaps I should have made another gun..."* Red murmured, almost to herself.

Heroes aren't supposed to kill, Hawks reminded them sternly. *But if it's a choice between his life and an innocent's…*

"We'll take the blame if it's our call." Silver stated. Hawks got the oddest sensation of him moving his glasses up his nose. Was it just him or had their presences become even clearer lately?

I hope it doesn't come to that. Hawks admitted.

He walked with Miruko and Aizawa into the mall, adjusting his green bandanna as he went. He and Rumi were in 'incognito' outfits again. Aizawa simply wore a baseball cap, shirt and sweatpants that might actually be pajamas. It was difficult to tell. But hey, Hawks was not one to turn up his nose at comfortable clothes. He only showed revulsion at that horrid sweater Aizawa thought was 'cute'. How could a man who appreciated the adorableness of kittens not know *puce* and *mustard yellow* should never be worn by anyone?

As Hawks wandered through the mall he bumped into another person. They faltered and he instinctively clasped their hand, keeping them upright.

"Sorry—"

He spotted a black hoodie and tensed, only to see a blank mask underneath the hood. It completely covered their face except for their eyes, which seemed to be a shade of green. Or maybe blue? It was hard to tell in the mall's lighting. But they were not acidic green like— Heartbreak's had been. And— more importantly— they were not Shigaraki's bright red.

Hawks released the person and cleared his throat. "Sorry. You okay?"

Those eyes blinked at him, narrowing slightly as if they were trying to process the question.

"Fine." they said lowly.

Their pronunciation was odd and muffled, like they were unused to speaking. Or maybe it was the mask that made their voice a little odd? Why wear a *full* mask to cover their face anyway? Hawks wondered what mutation they were hiding and felt ashamed for assuming they had one. Before he could respond, Miruko noticed she was not with him.

"Oi!" Miruko called back at him. "You coming or what?"

"*We are on a schedule."* Silver reminded him tightly.

"I have to go." Hawks said hurriedly. "Sorry for bumping into you."

He hurried after Miruko and they started combing through the mall.

Hawks did not let himself be distracted by shopping as the minutes passed. Aizawa seemed perfectly at ease, as if this were a mere shopping trip, yet Hawks could not calm down.

As he followed Miruko towards a men's store— she was planning to trap Aizawa in a fitting room until he bought something that wasn't pajamas, sweatpants, or black— he spotted Midoriya just as he was grabbed by a man in a black hoodie. *Crap*, they hadn't found Shigaraki before he found Deku. His and the voices' nervousness vanished, replaced by a hyper-sharp focus.

"Can we sit for a minute? I need a breather."

Aizawa's eyes snapped to him as he used their agreed upon code but his expression did not change. "You *are* looking a little pale."

That wasn't part of the code. Hawks resisted the urge to glare as Miruko reached over and felt his forehead.

"Your skin is clammy." She worried. "Let's sit for a sec."

She took his arm and frog marched him to some seats. Hawks sat and set his bags beside him, pretending to relax as he glanced casually around. Around the corner, nearly hidden by the plants between them, he spotted green hair beside a black hoodie. His pulse quickened and Green took a shaky breath. From this angle he could just see Shigaraki's pale fingers around Midoriya's neck.

A bubble of rage built in his chest. How could no one see that man had his hand around a kid's throat? He motioned subtly to Miruko and leaned on her, keeping his voice low. "Seven o'clock. Black sweatshirt. He has his hand around the kid's neck."

Miruko stiffened and Hawks tried not to think about how *obvious* her anger was.

Don't think about her mission don't think about her mission focus on the now—

"Aizawa, you got him?" Hawks asked levelly.

He could see a muscle jumping in Aizawa's throat. "Yes."

Hawks inhaled. Exhaled. The sounds of chatter and laughing— blissfully ignorant— civilians faded away, leaving only the sounds of Midoriya's sharp breathing and Shigaraki's low voice.

"—I'll create a world without All Might. And cause enough destruction to show them all how fragile their justice really is. From this day forward… that's my conviction."

Red hot anger erupted in Hawks's chest, and he knew it was not completely his own.

We won't let you .

Feathers shot from loose green sleeves. They did not spark, or explode, or catch on fire or turn into knives. They did not glow with golden light. They did not need to. Not for this. Because Tomura Shigaraki was not the Symbol of Fear, Leader of the League of Villains and Paranormal Liberation Front, destroyer of Hero Society and the peaceful world.

And if they had any say, he *never* would be.

Feathers caught the loose fabric of Shigaraki's sweatshirt and yanked his arm back as another feather slipped under his middle finger, keeping it away from Midoriya's skin. As soon as they were torn from the teen's neck, Hawks covered a couple of Shigaraki's other fingers with two separate feathers as an extra precaution. If he couldn't touch the feathers with all of them he should not be able to use his Quirk.

Four more feathers separated villain and teen completely, yanking them away from each other. Midoriya was safely caught before he could hit the ground but Shigaraki flew several feet, propelled by telekinetically controlled fletchettes.

A few civilians screamed. Hawks immediately summoned his recognizable wings out from under his clothes and to his back as he grabbed Shigaraki and slammed him face down on the tile floor. The shrieks around him became relieved gasps and excited squeals and he already heard a couple people searching desperately for something for Hawks to sign. He focused on his target. Shigaraki thrashed and spat curses at him and Heroes in general but could not break free, with Hawks expertly keeping him pinned. Midoriya stared at Hawks in shock, his green eyes standing out starkly against his pale skin.

"You okay, kid?" Hawks asked rapidly.

Midoriya nodded mutely. Somehow, his skin lost a few more shades of color as he processed what had nearly happened.

"We need to stop meeting like this." Hawks muttered.

"Deku!"

A girl he recognized as Ochaco Uraraka burst out of the crowd of onlookers and ran up to Midoriya. She knelt at his side, gripping his shoulders with oddly-bent fingers as she checked him for injury.

"Are you alright? You—" She glanced at Hawks and did a double-take. "H-*Hawks?*"

"Hello." Hawks greeted distractedly.

In his defense he was a little busy watching as Miruko stalked towards Shigaraki. She looked more like a lioness prowling towards a downed gazelle than a rabbit and he wondered if he might actually have to hold her back a bit. She did tend to get angry when kids were almost hurt. She was much like Aizaw in that regard. Hawks had no idea where Eraserhead himself was. Probably keeping a low profile or watching for more trouble. As Miruko put Shigaraki in cuffs— with Hawks's feathers still covering his fingers— Hawks scanned the area for any more unfriendly faces.

Midoriya chose that moment to jolt out of his stupor. "Hawks? What are you doing here?"

Hawks scratched his cheek and watched Miruko cheerfully dig her knee into Shigaraki's back with more force than was strictly necessary. "Miruko and I were shopping."

"Y-You acted so *quickly*." Midoriya squeaked. Hawks temporarily abandoned his search and checked the kid for shock. His pulse was steady, if a little quick. It seemed he just hadn't fully comprehended he'd been rescued yet. "I didn't even see you move."

"Speed is kinda my thing." Hawks said vaguely.

Midoriya began muttering to himself. From what Hawks could gather, he was trying to calculate the velocity of his feathers. Hawks began his cursory scanning again— he had to check, just in *case*— but felt his lips twitch. The kid would be fine—

Hawks spotted another black-hooded figure in the crowd and his heartbeat doubled.

He could see a bit of the face under that hood.

It was *Dabi*.

White's emotions struck him, clouding his thoughts with a chaotic mixture of rage, sorrow, and guilt. Hawks and the voices— including White— pushed them into a corner because they needed to focus. To their surprise, Dabi did not step in and start burning the mall down. Then again, Dabi hadn't been the type to attack civilians. Not yet, anyway.

Cold— *familiar*— blue eyes met Hawks's and went wide before narrowing into slits. Before Hawks could tense and call on a feather— as White's ice and fire rose just under the surface of his skin— Dabi turned away, disappearing into the crowd.

Most importantly, he did *not* assist Shigaraki.

Hawks's unease multiplied by nine.

"He was probably sent here to monitor Shigaraki." Green said nervously.

Then why didn't he step in?

"Dabi did not care much about the League's other members." White said. *"He just wants Endeavor taken down. It was after that happened and he survived again that he started*

burning the world down."

Let me guess; He thought he would die taking Endeavor with him and didn't take it well when he lived past his planned 'expiration date'.

"Correct." White said stoically but Hawks could feel his grief. He went on to explain in a completely toneless voice, and Hawks almost wished he didn't. *"That and... Dabi and Endeavor's battle killed Mom along with my father."*

…Oh.

Hawks numbly watched the police drag Shigaraki away, accompanied by Eraserhead, Miruko, and the recently-arrived Edgeshot. He remained at Midoriya's side for now, just in case. The kid was calming down, though a sheen of sweat covered his skin.

If we tell Dabi we're investigating Endeavor—

"He won't give up on vengeance." White stated flatly. *"He wants Endeavor **dead**."*

How much? Hawks asked just short of desperately, almost as if it were *his* brother he was talking about and not White's.

Ironically, White was logically distant and cold. *"Enough that he will be willing to hurt innocents soon."*

What about his siblings?

White flinched, his stoic exterior cracking. *"No."*

Sorry, I didn't think—

"This is not about my non-existent relationship with Touya." White interrupted. *"And to answer your question, he will hurt his siblings too, eventually. Even Natsuo."* His voice grew softer. *"Touya is dead."*

Hawks felt uneasy. *He was closest to Natsuo?*

"Yes. Natsuo loved Touya and never forgave Endeavor for killing him." White's stoic voice shook. *"But Dabi took his Quirk for his own gain and **murdered** my brother anyway. Touya. Is. **Dead**."*

Hawks had nothing he could say to that. Aizawa returned to take care of his wayward students and Hawks went with the police to take Shigaraki to a very secure cell.

The future Symbol of Fear and leader of the Paranormal Liberation Front had been arrested.

None of them celebrated.

They knew this would not be the end of it.

What are the chances the League of Villains' first bonding exercise is going to be a prisoner convoy attack?

"One hundred percent." Purple said flatly. *"They're going to try to release him, likely during transit. They're not ready to break someone out of Tartarus. Not **yet**."*

XXXXXXX

Izuku's legs still felt like jelly as he answered the police and Detective Tsukauchi's questions. His classmates lingered nearby, but none of them had much to add to the tale except Uraraka, who had arrived near the end. Izuku tried not to think about what might have happened if Hawks had not been nearby… so *of course* he did. As he told a policeman as much as he could remember— including what Shigaraki said— he closed his hands into fists, hoping it would stop their tremors.

Tsukauchi spoke to his fellow officer and guided him away to a quieter area, away from the crowds of onlookers wondering what had happened. A familiar skeletal figure waited and Izuku felt his lingering terror ease.

"All Might!"

All Might— in his emancipated form— made a shushing motion. "Not so loud, young Midoriya. There's no telling who is nearby."

"Sorr—" Before Izuku could apologize, All Might's hand landed on his head.

He ruffled his green locks once, but Izuku felt his thin fingers shake. "I'm glad you're okay. I'm sorry I was not there to save you."

"I'm fine. Hawks *was* there. He helped me." Izuku reminded both All Might and himself.

All Might's words served only as a reminder of what Shigaraki said, and although Izuku's thoughts went to Shigaraki and the civilians that lingered even now— How many were unaware that they had been so close to death?— they also went further back, to a cold night street in Hosu. Shigaraki mocked Heroes for being unable to save everyone. Was he talking about the Nomu as well? Or did he not count them as human and thus 'savable', as many did not?

"All Might..." He found himself asking. "…are there times you can't save everyone?"

All Might's brow lowered and his lips twisted into a sorrowful frown. "Yes. A lot, unfortunately."

But you've never lost anyone after you've arrived at the scene…

After. But what about *before*?

Izuku nodded slowly and kept his gaze down, gripping the strap of his backpack. When he was a child, he had thought Heroes saved every person, no matter the odds. A part of him still believed that, but he also knew they had their limits. Like today. If Hawks and Miruko had

not been there, it would have taken time for Heroes to arrive if Shigaraki made a scene. How many innocents would have died in that time? Izuku never wanted to find out.

"Izuku!"

Inko Midoriya appeared at the end of the hall and ran towards them, tears in her eyes. She grabbed Izuku and hugged him so tightly he thought his ribs might break.

"You're safe." she sobbed. "Oh, you're *safe*. My heart can't take this anymore…"

"I'm alright, Mom." Izuku reassured her. "Don't cry. Hawks saved me."

"That's right..." She sniffled and wiped at her eyes with a handkerchief. "I need to thank him. This is the second time he's saved my son."

Her words struck a chord with Izuku and he felt himself relax, sinking into his mother's warm arms. It was true that Heroes were not always there to save everyone, but Hawks had been today. There was no point in brooding over what could have happened because this time, everything turned out okay.

"I'm sure he'd appreciate it, Mom."

XXXXXXX

Shinso was so exhausted he could barely put one foot in front of the other. His training had been shorter than usual today since his teacher had other matters to take care of earlier, but his muscles and lungs still burned as much as ever. Despite his aches and exhaustion, he felt oddly exhilarated. His calf muscle cramped up and he winced, stumbling a bit before he found his balance once more.

Aizawa noticed. "You can stay at the apartment again. Go ahead and shower."

"Yes, Sensei." Shinso replied.

He followed Aizawa hom— to the teachers' apartments. It was a usual routine nowadays. Aizawa worked Shinso hard and offered to let him stay instead of traveling. Shinso had accepted the invitation so much Aizawa's place felt more like home than home sometimes. He was not about to complain about going to bed in a guest room that was practically his.

His training with Aizawa was already paying off. Shinso could see he had bulked up compared to where he started. Thanks to Aizawa, he might just have a chance to fulfill his dream of becoming a Hero.

I'm getting closer, he thought proudly as he removed his sweaty clothes. *I might actually get there someday.*

Shinso showered and changed into the pajamas he'd left for such occasions, climbing into bed. It felt like he had just pulled his blanket up when someone knocked timidly on his door. Shinso blinked and got out of bed, opening it.

Eri peered up at him, clad in light green pajamas with her Hawks plushie clutched in her arms. And here was the difference in the usual routine. Shinso stayed at Aizawa's often but did not interact with Eri much. It would be an exaggeration to say she avoided him but she was certainly shy and cautious. Which was why seeing her now was such a surprise. He knew better than to act it though.

"Hi, Eri." Shinso greeted casually. "Do you need something? Should I get Aizawa?"

She shook her head and looked down at her bare feet.

"Do you want to come in?"

She nodded.

Shinso stepped aside and she scuttled over to his chair, perching on it. Her feet swung Hugh off the ground and he checked to make sure she would not fall off before sitting on his bed.

"What's got you up at—" he checked the time. "—3:30?"

Eri kept her eyes down. He noticed her horn had grown again. Aizawa had warned him that meant her Quirk may act up so he reminded himself to tell his teacher when he had the chance.

"You've known Mister Eraserhead for a long time, right?" She mumbled from behind her hair.

Longer than you, I suppose. "Yes."

Eri's tiny fingers squeezed her plushie, turning white. "How do I make him not mad at me?"

It took Shinso a moment to process her question. ***What.***

There was no way Aizawa was angry at this little kid. She could turn to Vigilantism and Aizawa wouldn't be upset with her.

"Do you want to tell me why you think he's upset with you?" he asked steadily.

Aizawa had been very insistent about ensuring Eri felt like she had a choice. Shinso hoped he'd been clear enough that she didn't *have* to answer him.

Eri shifted in her seat, head still down. "Mister Aizawa said you have a Quirk that people think is bad." Shinso's breath caught. "But Aizawa says it isn't bad. Right?"

She looked to *him* for confirmation that she was a good person. *Him.*

"*He's gonna be a Villain someday. Just you wait."*

Shinso pushed past the memories. "That's right. Our Quirks are *not* bad. Neither are we." His eyes narrowed. "Why? Did someone say something to you?"

He wondered if he could convince Aizawa to let him practice his capture techniques on whoever said that to her.

Thankfully, Eri was shaking her head. "Aizawa is the person who reached out their hand and helped you, right? Like Hawks and Ennea helped me?"

It was a bit more complicated than that but Shinso nodded slowly, trying to understand where this was going. "In a way."

Eri hunched in the chair, shoulders quivering. "Mister Aizawa is very nice. He's done a lot for me. But…" Her eyes filled with tears. "He doesn't want me to see Hawks. I heard him tell Mic. He said Hawks shouldn't come over because of me. And I don't know what I did *wrong*."

Shit.

Shinso knew why Hawks hadn't been over. His Agency had been swarmed with cases, which Aizawa had seen as an opportunity to get Eri to become used to other people without Hawks but she didn't see it that way. From her point of view the one person she trusted absolutely was being kept away from her. *Of course* she thought she was being punished. Shinso struggled to think of a way to tell her that wasn't the case in a way she would understand.

"Aizawa isn't keeping Hawks away because you did something bad. And he's certainly not keeping Hawks away because of you in general. Hawks is very busy right now is all."

"He wasn't too busy before." Eri mumbled.

Shinso might mistake it for a childish response if not for how sadly she said it, like it truly was somehow her fault that Hawks couldn't visit. He resisted the instinct to ruffle her hair comfortingly— she might not like to be touched— and settled for what he hoped was a reassuring look.

"We can talk to Aizawa about inviting Hawks over if you want."

Her brow furrowed. "We?"

"Of course. You don't have to ask alone if you don't feel like it."

Eri stared at him like he was one of the most confusing people she had ever seen. She quickly ducked her head again. "Can I stay with you? My room is too…" She hesitated. "Big."

Shinso's room wasn't any smaller but he didn't mention it. "Sure. You can grab your pillow and blanket if you'd like."

She nodded and tiptoed to her room, quickly returning. Shinso moved over and— to his surprise— she curled up right next to him with her Hawks plushie still clutched in her arms. Shinso lay on his back and closed his eyes, listening to her breathing even out. Just as he was about to drift off, he heard her whisper.

"Thank you for being nice."

Realizing she thought he was asleep, he stifled a reply. It was only when she fell asleep, breathing softly, that Shinso allowed himself to smile.

XXXXXXX

Nice bird.

Nice, wing bird.

Wing bird was nice.

Not scream like girl scream and run away.

Sh hh.

Mask her want to eat.

Nice wing bird.

He want eat.

Nice wing bird.

Not exist then.

Exist?

Awake?

Speak to me.

Listening.

Mission.

Order?

Catch the bird die.

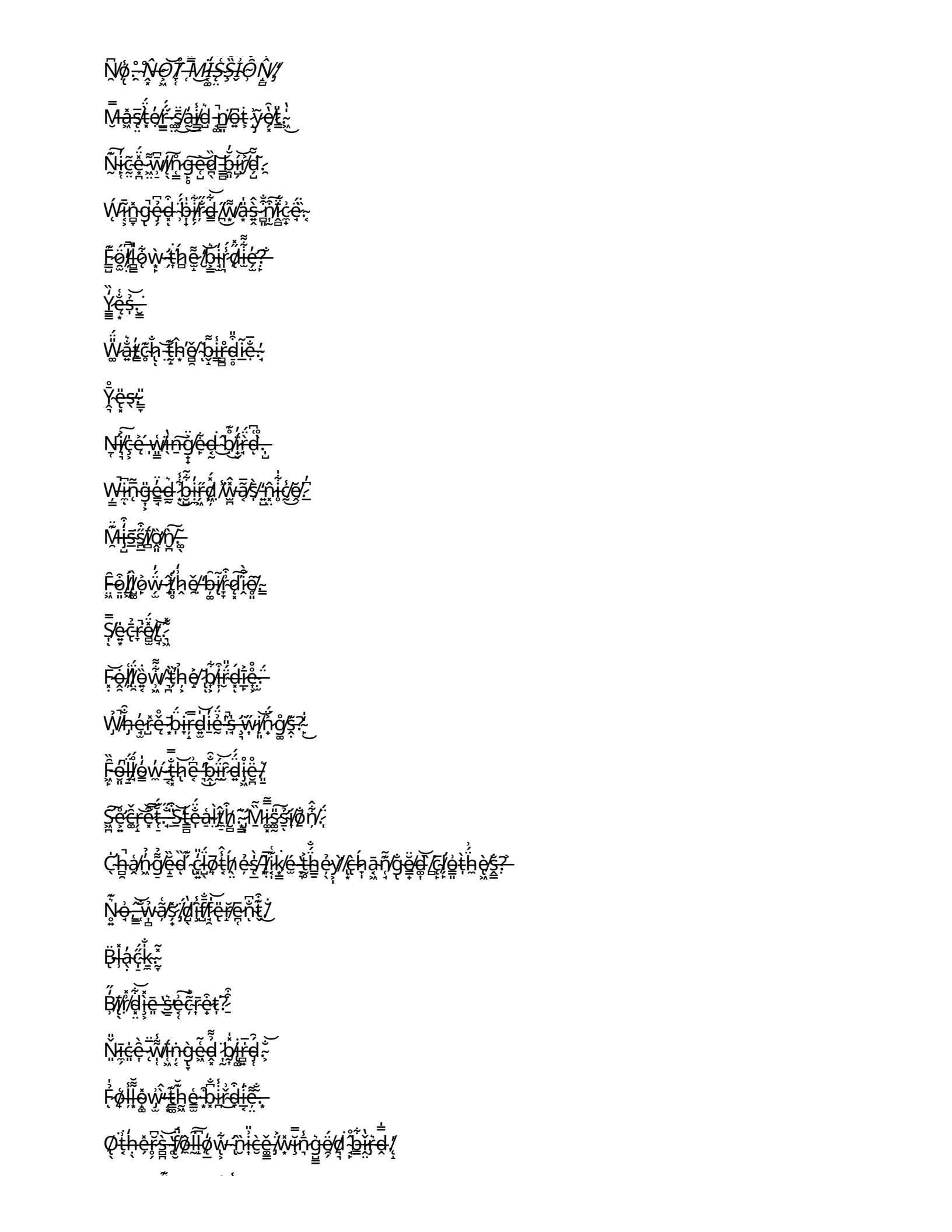
Pain where head me when hurts pain?

Not mission.

Catch the bird die.

No.

Catch the bird die.



Wåţçĥïñġ-ţöó-

Ştöþ

Kłłł

Ńǫ

Hëŕǫëśźźdǫńǿţ

Hëŕǫ?

Ńǿ

Ńǿţ-Hëŕǫ

Hëŕfäúłţ

Ńǫ

Hëŕfäúłţŵëßŵąś-cäptúŕëđ

Đëáđ-thèń-nǫţ-dëáđ

Hëŕfäúłţ-nëẅ-Mąśţëŕ-hàđ

Śąvëđ?

Đąṁṁëđ?

Fǫłłǫẅëđ

Śąẅ

Hëŕ

Mąśķëđ-bųţ-śąẅ

Ůńđëńíąbłë

Ítẅąś-ńëẅ

Hëŕfäúłţ

ŃǪ

Ńíçë-ẅíṅġëđ-bíŕđ

~~Follow.~~

~~Secret.~~

~~Master// wants nice wings and bird?~~

~~Mission.~~

~~Keep wings and bird alive so later give to Master?~~

~~Mission yes?~~

~~Await further// orders//~~

XXXXXXX

It was almost funny how quickly Hawks and the voices' paranoia could be proven right. It took a couple stress-filled days of mounting unease where Hawks threw himself into work and even went out as Ennea to try to keep himself distracted, but on the day of Shigaraki's prison transfer the other shoe finally dropped.

They just did not expect the first problems to come from *their* side.

Of course, Hawks *should* have known the Commission would be their obstructive, priority-bungled selves.

Putting away the dangerous leader of the League of Villains that attacked students from UA — who were the future of Hero Society— and publicly said he wanted to destroy everything? Pfft, that wasn't important. Not at *all*.

The Commission President herself called to inform him he was too busy today.

Apparently, his 'important mission' was a petty thief investigation.

And a photo shoot.

They wanted him to go to a *photo shoot* instead of accompanying Shigaraki's prison transfer.

"*If I did not know better I'd swear they were secretly in All For One's pocket."* Purple said flatly.

"*Are we sure they aren't?"* Green asked, surprisingly cynical.

"*Unfortunately, no."*

"*Don't you mean 'fortunately'?"* Pink questioned.

"*Nope. If they were working for All For One we'd have an obvious excuse to kick their asses."*

"*Can we arrest people for being **petty bitches**?"* Orange snarled.

"*Perhaps an 'obstructing a Hero' charge would stick…"* Silver said thoughtfully.

Hawks knew he was serious and nipped that bad thought at the bud. *We are not bringing the Commission to court for that.*

"*Of course not.*" White said in his usual, serious tone.

"*We have other, worse offenses to try them for."* Red added.

***Not** the time, guys.*

It was a *really* good thing the Commission President had called him instead of demanding a meeting. If she had tried to make him go to her, Miruko might have locked Hawks in his Agency out of fear that he might not emerge from Commission HQ. Hawks wished that wouldn't be an overreaction on her part.

"Ma'am, Shigaraki's transfer is today." Hawks knew it was naive of him, but maybe the Commission President did not realize the date—

"*I am aware."* she said coolly. *"You will not be involved."*

So much for that delusion.

"*This is **ridiculous**."* Orange snarled. *"You aren't Cinderella asking to go to a shitty ball."*

"*You watched Cinderella?"* Yellow asked, surprised.

"***Everyone** has, dumbass!"*

The President was not speaking. Hawks waited a moment and realized she was waiting for him to agree. But he… he shouldn't, right? Heroes were supposed to save people. But if the Commission said no…

"*Gold, we **need** to be there."* Green stressed. *"The League **will** attack. The last time they did something like this, Stain was set free. That was before they got their new members. Now they have at least Dabi with them. I wouldn't be surprised if the rest have joined up as well."*

Without Shigaraki, will they fall apart? Hawks asked.

"*Not with All For One there."*

But it'll be a step in the right direction, denying All For One his apprentice.

"*Yes."*

Hawks's stomach churned but he took a shuddering breath. "I will be accompanying the convoy."

"*Would you like to repeat that, Hawks?"* the Commission President asked coolly.

Hawks's mouth was dry. "I d-don't think I need to, ma'am."

The Commission President sighed. The sound was mundane and normal and disappointed but it sent a lance of panic through Hawks like a dagger in his chest. He locked his muscles, wings tense and rigid, and tried not to let them shake even though he knew she could not see him.

"*Of course not. And so your ungrateful and selfish nature rears its head again."* the Commission President said, sounding completely unsurprised.

"*You are not selfish."* Green whispered before Hawks could do more than flinch. *"You are not ungrateful. You're **saving people**."*

"*Need I remind you who saved you from that neglected trash heap you called a home?"*

"*Says the bitch who has trash coming out of her mouth. Don't listen to it."* Orange.

"*We gave you a life, an education, a **chance**. Yet this is how you pay us back?"*

"*Says the people who steal most of your money and time."* Red.

"*Your parents would have sold you to a trafficking ring the first chance they had."*

"*They may not have cared, but we do. You're not alone."* Pink.

"*Without us, you'd have died long ago."*

"*That's no excuse. What they're doing to you is wrong."* Silver.

"*We trained you and made you who you are."*

"*You don't owe them anything."* White.

"*We used precious time, personnel, and resources to make you into a Hero—"*

"*They **don't** own you. You're **not** their puppet."* Yellow.

"*—so the very least you could do is show some respect to those that gave you everything and **hold your tongue**."*

"*If they really were invested in your Hero career and not stroking their own egos, they wouldn't silence you like this."* Purple.

Hawks did not speak. His voice was locked in his mind as the voices' murmurs filled his head with the kind of supposedly selfish thoughts he wasn't supposed to have.

'Supposedly?'

Oh no.

"*You will go to your Agency and investigate the thief.*" The Commission President stated. *"Then you will go to the photo shoot. When that is done, you will be driven to my office for a meeting. Am I understood?"*

"*Don't listen to her, Gold."* Green whispered. *"You **don't have to** listen to her.*"

Hawks should keep quiet.

He should only speak to agree with his —[illegible]— boss.

He should not voice his thoughts, as always.

It was safer for him that way.

But this wasn't *about* him, and if there was one good thing the Commission taught him, it was to save lives. And he was already wasting time here.

Don't be selfish, Hawks.

But what *was* 'selfish'?

Hawks knew the answer: putting his safety over that of others. So he clung to that thought, gathered himself, and spoke.

"No. I *won't*." Hawks wished his voice didn't shake but he forced himself to continue speaking. "My sidekicks can handle the cases for today. I will be completing my mission to get Tomura Shigaraki to a cell in Tartarus. Good day."

He hung up before the panic could fully grip him and laid his head down on the table, trying not to hyperventilate.

How dead am I?

*"...I'm fucking **proud** of you."* Orange stated, voice tinged with that pride.

Hawks barely noticed it. What had he *done*? He should call her back and apologize for being selfish but he *wasn't* being selfish because making sure Shigaraki was locked in Tartarus was *important*. That didn't change the fact that *he'd openly disobeyed the Commission*. Hawks began to shake for some reason as he breathed in sharp, lurching gasps. Oh, was he having another anxiety attack and wasting even more time? Good for him. Real Hero material right there. He rubbed his cold arms, trying to warm them up.

They won't let me get away with this.

"We'll protect you." Silver said firmly.

Hawks probably should have thought something along the lines of 'I don't need your protection.' but all that came out was, ***You can't**.*

"Watch us." Green growled.

Hawks gulped and shoved his anxiety down down down where it couldn't reach him for a few hours. He double-checked the security in his headphones as he took to the sky.

Despite his visor, his vision was blurry as the wind blasted into his face. He heard the voices murmuring encouragement, which was kind of weird since he did not need it. He knew his mission. The other stuff could be dealt with later. If he *had* a later. The Commission would not take his actions well.

For now, Hawks prepared himself for the mission he chose—

*Oh no oh no oh— **Stop**. I'm saving people. **Don't** regret it.*

If they kept Shigaraki in jail— and maybe arrested a few more members of the League in the process— he convinced himself it did not matter what happened to him later. He'd pay any personal price to save the world.

He just hoped he did not drag his friends down with him.

Chapter End Notes

In regards to the All Might-Nomu reveal, I'm so glad I got to this point at last. That reveal was originally supposed to be in chapter eight (after Orange freaked out about Dark Shadow grabbing him/Hawks by the head which Deku mistook for trauma associated with his kidnapping). It didn't feel narratively right for Orange to have that vulnerability just yet so I changed my mind and moved the reveal to here. Because of that change I had to keep double-checking to make sure I didn't accidentally refer to All Might being turned into a Nomu until after this point. I actually had to remove a sentence from chapters ten and nineteen right before posting because I almost forgot that it hadn't been revealed yet (I was going over the files on the site in preparation to post them when I realized the references were there and went "Oh sh-t! Deleting that.") I almost accidentally revealed Nomu-All Might early because of a mistake! Two times! That would've been a bummer, haha. Now I don't have to worry about removing references to that anymore so phew.

Sorry for rambling but I wanted to share just how close I was to messing this up, haha.

For Their Sakes

Tomura Shigaraki's prison transfer would begin in Tokyo and go all the way to Tartarus. It would take place during the day and although many of the roads were cleared out, Hawks was mentally and physically prepared to evacuate countless civilians.

Orange's annoyance tingled at the edge of his thoughts but Hawks now knew it was because of *fear,* not simple irritation. Orange would never admit it, especially not to himself, but the thought of losing more people— *Just like during that Nomu's rampage*— frightened him. And every person— civilian, Hero, policeman, or guard—was a potential hostage and life to lose if the Villains decided to play dirty.

They all knew some members of the League would.

Hawks's thoughts turned to black portals and he gave the area another cursory glance. He had not arrived at the station yet, but one could never be too cautious.

So why were you so twitchy about Aizawa and Kurogiri last night?

"Kurogiri is Aizawa's supposed to be dead best friend from UA, Oboro Shirakumo." Orange said bluntly. *"His death was faked—"*

"*Or he was brought back to life."* White said lowly.

"*—and he was captured and brainwashed by All For One."*

"Our Aizawa found out who he used to be and hesitated during a fight with him." Silver said solemnly.

Hawks did not need to be told how that ended. He had gone through this enough times to predict what was coming and braced himself for the cold grip of their grief.

"Kurogiri sent Nomu to attack us and came himself." White explained stoically. Hawks forced himself not to beg him to stop the story since he already knew how this was going to end. He did not need to hear it. He *knew*. *"Aizawa-sensei decided it was rational to—"*

"'*Rational' my **ass**. 'Hypocritical' is more like it."* Orange snarled, but his voice was choked.

"*...Aizawa was his **protective** self and tricked us into leaving without him. He said he'd be right behind us but..."* White trailed off.

"*He stayed behind to fight the Nomu and Kurogiri alone and attempted to reach Shirakumo."* Red finished shakily.

Hawks didn't need to be told it hadn't worked. His stomach churned. *And what happened to Shir— Kurogiri?*

*"We think Shirakumo was… **there** enough to realize what he'd done."* Green whispered.

Hawks paused at that. *How do you know? I thought you left and Aizawa was… alone.*

Because he was braced for it, their sorrow— and horror— was less like an abyss and more like cold water chilling his skin. The weight of their failure— *They should have been there.*— was still too much to bear and he wrapped his arms around himself in a futile attempt to relieve the pain in his chest.

"*He was. They recovered footage of the battle. Kurogiri killed himself after murdering Eraserhead."* Purple said flatly.

Hawks imagined how he would react if he became aware he'd been brainwashed, committed countless evils, attacked teenagers, and killed Rumi. He shuddered. *Should we attempt a rescue?*

"We should try to retrieve Kurogiri and get him help when we have the opportunity." Green said vaguely.

Hawks could tell he was not completely on board with the idea. He didn't blame him. Green only knew Oboro Shirakumo as Kurogiri, the Villain who attacked his friends and killed his teacher. But in that tortured, misty shell might be a person that had no choice, just like the Nomu.

Eri might be able to reverse him into who he used to be… before. Someday.

He knew it might *not* be possible considering what happened to other Nomu when she tried to use her Quirk on them, but they could hope Kurogiri was a different story since he was a special case.

"Someday." Green echoed. *"For today, let's get Shigaraki put away. He might not know the intricacies of All For One's plans but we might get something useful out of him."*

That's a good next step if I survive long enough to question him, Hawks thought brightly.

The voices saw through his false cheer.

"We told you that the Commission won't touch you." Pink growled.

Hawks hoped he managed to keep his '*You can't do anything to stop them*.' to himself. *Yeah. I know what you said.*

"*But you don't believe we can do it."* Orange growled.

I do.

"Liar." Red said gently.

Hawks ignored her and the heavy feeling in his chest.

He arrived and gave another paranoid scan of the area before he landed beside Ingenium. The armored Hero somehow managed to convey his startled reaction through his mask, and

Hawks had to stifle the urge to giggle hysterically because he knew he was not expected for this mission and he was probably going to be *killed later*.

I talked back to and disobeyed the boss who can make my life all kinds of hell and might torture and kill me. Or send me to— He shook himself. *Dealing with that **later**.*

Hawks put on a lazy grin and sauntered up to Ingenium.

"Hey. Anything exciting happen yet?" he asked as if nothing could bother him and nothing was wrong. Which were complete lies, by the way. But it was nice to pretend.

Hawks scanned the area once more and accidentally locked eyes with one of Ingenium's sidekicks. The man startled and looked around as if trying to figure out if Hawks was really looking at him. Upon realizing he was, the sidekick waved shyly. Hawks cheerfully waved back.

"Not yet." Ingenium said. He gave Hawks another curious glance. "I'm surprise you could make it. The Hero Commission rep I talked to said you were busy."

Hawks gritted his teeth into a smile. "They tried to make me 'busy'. It didn't work."

Ingenium stared at him wordlessly and he remembered this particular Hero did not know—

"*—the Hero Commission is a flaming piece of shit!"*

"*Hush, Orange."*

—what the Hero Commission was really like. Oops.

Hawks awkwardly cleared his throat. "At the mall I saw a suspicious hooded man who fled as soon as I spotted him. He was pretty burned up and smelled like smoke so he might have a fire Quirk."

"Got it. I'll keep an eye out." Ingenium said.

Hawks nearly experienced whiplash at how quickly his word was believed. Usually he had to prepare a presentation and slides for people like the Commission to believe him.

Hawks swallowed another hysterical giggle fit. *Your brother is awesome, Silver.*

"He is." Silver agreed happily.

If the bigger hitters show up— They all knew he was talking about Kurogiri, Gigantomachia, the Nomu, and All For One himself. *—do we do that… merge thing or whatever we did?*

"Let's try not to." Green decided. *"We can't afford to become catatonic again."*

Hopefully our switch out speed is enough then.

There would be cameras and too many witnesses to see Hawks using a new Quirk but it did not matter. The Commission already knew something was weird about Hawks's Quirk and keeping it secret— like the Commission probably would want in order to hold it over him— was not worth losing lives.

"*That's right, Gold."* Green said.

Hawks did not understand why he sounded so happy.

Before he could mull on it, helmeted figures marched out of the station with a cuffed and gagged Shigaraki in the middle. Their faces were completely covered by large visors with the exception of their mouths. Hawks knew it was for protection— against physical attacks now and more personal forms of retaliation later— but felt a trickle of worry as the group of near-identical guards got into position. It would be way too easy for someone to infiltrate the police escort, especially for Toga. Hell, Toga did not even need to wear a uniform to sneak in. All she needed was to kidnap a guard beforehand, take his or her blood, and go to work.

"Toga has trouble containing her bloodlust. Watch for enthusiasm when there are injuries." Green shuddered and Hawks saw a flash of a girl wearing a Shiketsu High School uniform with a wide, unstable grin. *"And disturbing smiles."*

Hawks hummed to himself and took a moment to study Shigaraki. He didn't look… angry for once. Sure, there was some vitriol there— particularly towards the Heroes around him— but there was none of the all-encompassing rage Hawks had expected. Maybe… Tenko Shimura wasn't completely gone? Maybe, away from All For One's manipulations, he could—

Hawks recoiled at the thought and shook himself. What was he *thinking*? This was *Shigaraki*, the Villain that wanted to destroy Hero Society and had ruined the voices' future. How could he feel *sympathy* for a Villain who intended to become a mass murderer and think there might be a good person that could be found in there? He was such an ignorant, lazy—

A rush of air sent Hawks into a battle-ready stance but when he saw who had arrived, he immediately lowered his feathers in shock.

The Symbol of Peace himself— freaking *All Might*— grinned down at him.

"Hello, young Hawks! And Ingenium!" He inclined his head towards the silver-armored Hero, who was likely as shocked as Hawks since he did not return the greeting. "I am here… to assist in this mission."

Hawks managed not to flinch at the phrase, especially now that he knew why it made the voices so panicked. He was half-certain he only managed not to recoil because he was so stunned. Naturally, the best response he could muster was an eloquent and well thought out "Huh?"

Truly, Hawks was a master of socialization and playing it cool.

All Might's smile slipped slightly. "I know I was not expected but this Villain attacked my students. I'd prefer he be locked away."

"He doesn't know Shigaraki is Tenko Shimura." Green breathed as if he himself had forgotten that not-so minor detail.

"*Don't tell him."* Silver said sharply.

Obviously. Hawks kept his expression neutral. "Yeah, I heard about that. I'd say 'I hope no Nomu show up' but I'm not naive."

All Might nodded solemnly. "I expect we will see some dark portals open along our path. But do not fear: Shigaraki will *not* be allowed to escape." His bright blue eyes glinted with heroic determination, and Hawks did his best to distance it from the monstrous Nomu he— *Crap*— Orange and Green had fought. "With him, we may be able to discover who created the Nomu and bring them down."

Hawks hadn't even considered that. If interrogating Shigaraki came up with nothing, he and Aizawa might need to find out a subtle way to get Ujiko on the Heroes' wanted list. "I'm glad you're h— you decided to stop by."

It was then that Shigaraki spotted All Might. In an instant, the hatred Hawks expected crushed anything else that might be there. Shigaraki could not speak with the gag covering his mouth, but the absolutely withering glare he gave the Symbol of Peace was bone-chilling. Hawks had never seen such vitriol in a person before. The look on Shigaraki's face was one of a man who saw the thing that stood for everything he despised, and that there was nothing he would hesitate to do to bring them down. All other emotions Shigaraki may have felt towards All Might and what he represented had been devoured by the utter *loathing* All For One had encouraged, spreading through everything he was— from his personality to his mind to his very soul— like a virus.

Those unhinged red eyes held no empathy or indecision. They only held a soul-devouring desire to see *everything* decay, starting with the Symbol of Peace that so many admired.

Despite himself, Hawks wondered how much was because of All For One. He knew he shouldn't since trying to make excuses for Villains was Bad, but he did. It would not affect his performance, though. He had a job to do and a future to save. There was no point in wondering about what-ifs.

A guard put a bag over Shigaraki's head and pushed him towards one of the vehicles. Hawks wondered why they had not done that inside and desperately hoped none of the guards were the petty type who wanted to flaunt the Heroes' 'victory' in the League of Villain leader's face and for him to see All Might was there. Then again, All Might had been an unexpected addition to their party, so that last reason was unlikely.

Hopefully. Though considering the Commission's own pettiness that morning, Hawks was not inclined to give people in power the benefit of the doubt at the moment.

More Heroes arrived and Hawks and the voices were unhappy to note they did not recognize most of them. In hindsight, maybe he should have asked Best Jeanist and Miruko to join the escort. Hawks kept his displeasure off his face as he listened to Silver try to reason with a cursing Orange, the former acknowledging that most higher-ranked Heroes would not be

asked to escort a villain like Shigaraki to jail. They did not see the leader of the rag-tag League of Villains as a huge threat. To them, he was little more than a thug. A thug who targeted All Might and UA, but that was nothing new, *right?*

If only they knew who backed Shigaraki and what he could become.

"*He won't get the chance. We* ***won't let him****."*

If anyone other than Green had said that, that statement would sound much less heroic and a lot more menacing.

Shigaraki was loaded into an armored vehicle, which functioned as one of several identical models. Despite that, Hawks had a feeling All For One or the Doctor had a Quirk at their disposal to tell *exactly* where Shigaraki would be, along with other surveillance abilities. He suspiciously eyed the cameras strewn around the area and wondered if they were a hindrance more than a help.

He realized Eraserhead was not among the Heroes present, and did a double-take. Why the hell wasn't Aizawa here? He knew about the future and All Might was present despite it being a school day. Why couldn't Eraserhead show up? Logically, Hawks knew he could not be at every mission, but Shigaraki had attacked him and his students. One would think he'd want to take part in this. Plus he'd kinda, sorta, *absolutely* had been counting on telling Aizawa about Tokoyami before the Commission inevitably came for him.

"*I hope everything is okay..."* Pink worried.

"*Hey, if something was up, Aizawa would call us."* Yellow reassured her.

Hawks wanted nothing more than to call Eraserhead and be sure of just things were indeed fine, but there was no time.

The convoy began to move, with the fastest Heroes running or flying alongside it. Hawks stayed far above, keeping an eye on the general area as his fellow Heroes— and to his not-surprise, Mockingjay, who seemed to have her hacker friend keeping an eye on things— murmured updates in his headphones.

They passed through busy streets at what felt like a snail's pace, with policemen standing by barriers and warding off overzealous reporters and curious— *foolish*— onlookers who watched the procession like it was a parade and not the transfer of a dangerous villain.

They exited the city at what seemed like a crawl, leaving the civilians— *potential hostages, all of them*— behind as they headed far from civilization.

Every second that ticked by was an eternity to Hawks, and he had half a mind to go to the vehicle that held Shigaraki and demand he just fly him to Tartarus so the long journey would be over in seconds, giving their enemy no time to attack before their leader was locked away. But he could not ask that, no matter how logical and safe that option seemed.

They were thirty-nine minutes away from Tartarus when black mist and sludge-like portals appeared in the air. The first attack— a blue inferno— struck the first vehicle and it veered off the road, hitting a tree before it burst into flames. Hawks stifled a curse and pushed away the grief that his feathers couldn't get inside the locked vehicle— *damn it*, those measures were *meant to keep them **safe***— and threw a barrage of knife-like feathers as the Villains as they emerged.

"*Are they the real ones or clones?"* Green murmured.

Hawks made note of his words but did not respond. Dabi threw a wave of flames to meet his feathers but not all of them burned as White used his own Quirk to give them some type of flame-resistance. One hit Mustard right in the forehead— with the blunt force of a hardy metal bar— and he went down before he could release his gas. The Nomu with him were much more durable and barely noticed the fletchettes, charging forward.

A hulking Nomu went for All Might and the Symbol of Peace met him head on. They collided and the air around them exploded, releasing a shockwave that overturned another vehicle. It also hit Hawks and he plummeted a couple feet, righting himself just before he could hit the ground.

Whoever thought going through woods was a good idea had questionable reasoning at the very least. The surrounding trees had already area caught on fire and Hawks could not be more relieved that they were in an *isolated* forest. On the one hand, no civilians. On the other, the woods were *on fire*, backup was hours away and… Hawks tried to contact Mockingjay but there was nothing but static. He was less surprised than he probably should be.

Near him, two police officers were yanked off their feet by an invisible force and pulled into the forest, vanishing into the trees. Before Hawks could dive after them, he saw a glint of metal and dodged backwards, avoiding Toga's needle and knife. The villain giggled as she chased after him like a cat stalking a bird and he could practically *see* hearts in her eyes.

"You're even more beautiful in person." She swooned. "And you'll be even more beautiful than *that* beaten up."

Disgust coiled in Hawks's gut, from both him and Green. He dodged as she swung at him because there was no way in hell she was getting a single drop of his blood. He used his feathers to cut off her equipment— ignoring her heartbroken wail—and shoved her into the side of a tree. She hit it with a cackle and landed on her feet.

You doing okay, Green?

"*I'm fine."* he said, though he sounded disturbed.

Hawks sensed he wasn't, but now wasn't the time.

Toga pouted at Hawks, tears in her eyes. "Don't you accept my love?"

"No." he said flatly.

She clapped her hands in delight. "Ooo, I understand! You like to play hard to get. How fun!"

"*Don't think I'm ignorant to your game, my Angel. You like playing hard to get, hmm?" A large hand grasped Hawks's jaw and hot breath tickled his ear. "Good. That makes it* ***fun****."*

Hawks flinched. He forced the memory away and dodged Toga's knife. A silver blur sped towards them and he had to wince as Ingenium collided with Toga, knocking her out with a strike to the temple.

Twice shouted her name and the armored Hero instantly engaged him, forcing the other Villain back. Twice retreated and Ingenium shot away. he launched himself into the air, breaking through Moonfish's teeth with a punch and tackling him to the ground. Despite the situation, seeing Ingenium in action brought a smile to Hawks's face.

A plume of blue flames separated him from Ingenium. Dabi— or possibly a clone of him— emerged from the inferno. Hawks calmly took a feather-sword from his wings as White focused on them, giving them as much fire-resistance as he could without taking over. Hawks felt the other voices' presences spread— most notably Orange and Yellow— as if they too were trying to shield him from the heat. Perhaps that was the only reason Dabi gave what some may mistake for a warning shot that he easily dodged instead of cremating him in an instant.

"So you're the one Twice is so interested in." Dabi scanned him with an utterly bored expression, as if Hawks were barely worth his attention. "Gotta say, I'm not impressed, *Hero*."

Hawks did not know what to think or feel. White and Silver's conflicting emotions swirled up inside him and his hand shook.

This was Touya Todoroki. This was Shoto's brother. This was Endeavor's abused son.

Except he had *chosen* to hurt others on the path to destroying his father. Touya had become a member of the League of Villains.

This was Dabi. This was Future Tsuyu's killer. This was a Villain that helped destroy the world.

Except he had not done that *yet*. Dabi was not a man who wanted to burn the world down. Not at this time.

Should Hawks feel empathy for Touya because of his past?

Should he hate Dabi because what he could become in the future?

He didn't know what to *think*.

Grief— for Touya, for Tsuyu, for Ojiro, for Natsuo, for *Mom*— clawed at Hawks's throat and he lowered his feather-blade.

"Touya Todoroki." he whispered, just loud enough to be heard over the flames. Dabi stiffened. "I know what Endeavor did. But this *won't* stop him from hurting them. This *won't* bring him down. There are other ways."

Dabi's hauntingly familiar blue eyes narrowed.

"Why are you trying? He won't care. He won't give up." White said tiredly.

A blue inferno exploded in front of Hawks and he threw himself backwards, throwing up an arm. Feathers gathered in front of his forearm, spreading out from his face to his shins, and turned into a thin metal shield. The shield was weak and melted from the heat but it was enough to stop him from burning. He was thrown backwards and hit the ground hard. He looked up and Dabi stared down at him, surrounded by blue flames as the smell of burning flesh wafted through the hot air.

"Stain said you're a true Hero, Hawks." Dabi murmured. "But what kind of Hero wants to shake things up?" He looked at Hawks as a sardonic, wild grin stretched the staples on his face until they bled. "Be careful where you fly, Hero. Or those soft wings of yours will burn."

Hawks almost had to laugh at that. *Thanks for the warning but I'm already too close to the sun.*

Dabi vanished into the flames.

Hawks watched him go as White and Silver's exhausted confusion tickled at his mind.

"I don't understand him at all."

He could not tell which one said that.

Another Dabi lunged for Hawks but he knew it was a fake. He instantly bisected it and rose above the flames, searching for the next enemy. He saw Spinner heading towards one of the few remaining vehicles— the one Shigaraki was in— and threw a feather. It just missed the edge of Spinner's hand as he reached for the door and he yelped, startled but unhurt.

"Agh! Hot!" A male voice screamed, on the verge of pained.

Hawks saw a humanoid black figure trapped in the blue flames and felt a surge of panic. Before he realized what he was doing, he dove into the fire and grabbed Twice, pulling him away from the inferno. To his surprise, Twice did not struggle and let Hawks set him down without a fuss.

"Damn Dabi is trying to kill me! Asshole! I don't look good crispy-fried." Twice glanced Hawks's way and gave him a double thumbs up. "Thanks for the save, buddy. Woo, those flames were toasty—"

Twice looked twice and realized who had saved him. Even with the mask, Hawks could see the horror in his expression. The Villain shifted back and forth indecisively and a part of Hawks realized he should probably be fighting him right now.

He did not attack.

Neither did Twice.

"Oh." Twice said lamely. "It's you. Uh. Have at thee, Hero...?" Twice trailed off and glanced away, almost as if he was ashamed. "…I can't."

Twice abruptly ran to the side— avoiding Hawks completely— to attack a guard. Behind him, the Nomu All Might had been facing went down with the Symbol of Peace standing victoriously.

Hawks had no time to celebrate. He made to take to the air to gain a bird's eye view of the battle, but something grabbed his foot and yanked him down. He instinctively stabbed the muscle-like tendons but his feather did not cut through. Muscular grabbed him by the throat and grinned at him sadistically, muscle fibers writhing in excitement.

"You're a weak one, aren't you?"

Hawks's feather-blade skidded harmlessly against his muscle-augmented skin.

Muscular's sadistic grin widened. "Show me your blood, birdie."

Hawks felt a flicker from Red and the feather in his palm turned to metal. He raised his hand, and stabbed Muscular straight in his remaining eye.

The Villain screamed and released him, clutching at his face.

Hawks saw the sidekick from earlier sneaking up behind him and opened his mouth to call a warning to the man to get back—

The back of Muscular's head exploded.

The sidekick behind the Villain fell with eerie grace, tipping to the side with blood dripping from a hole in his cheek as the light in his eyes faded.

In front of him, Muscular crumpled as well, a small, deceptively neat hole in the center of his forehead.

Hawks recoiled but kept his senses, ducking behind cover.

"*How?!"* Green screamed, more shocked than terrified. *"His Quirk should have—"*

"*Sniper!*" Ingenium bellowed.

Heroes and Villains alike hid behind trees and vehicles, neither knowing which side the sniper was on. That fact alone was enough to alarm Hawks more than the shot ever had, since it meant an unknown third party was involved.

Before any of them could resume the battle, black portals opened and the League members immediately vanished through them. Hawks had to blink twice and make sure he was not

seeing things, because there was *no way* the League retreated just like that.

Green's unease added onto his own. *"This isn't the end. He gave up too easily."*

"*I doubt that."* Pink said quietly. *"The guards..."*

Hawks did a head count and realized there were at least five less than there had been. He recalled how a few of them had been pulled into the woods. Had the League— likely Magne and Compress— taken them? He considered Toga's Transform Quirk— a Quirk no one except himself, the voices, and Aizawa were aware of— and a cold stone settled in his gut.

Shit. Their backup plan must be to—

"Hawks!"

Ingenium walked up to him, hobbling slightly as he settled most of his weight on his left leg. His gait slowed as his gaze locked on his fallen sidekick. "Royale…"

Tensei's skin was ashen, and when Hawks blinked, he saw flashes of countless Heroes collapsing from 'minor' wounds that were not as harmless as they appeared.

"Are you alright?" Hawks asked frantically.

"I'm fine." Ingenium told him faintly. "That girl grazed me with her knife. Pierced right through my armor." He gestured at his leg, revealing a bloody makeshift bandage. "I swear it looks worse than it is."

Silver's panic choked Hawks and he forcibly cleared his throat. "Did she take the knife with her? It uh—" He remembered at the last second that no one knew Toga's Quirk. "—might have been poisoned or something."

Ingenium twitched, as if he had not thought of such a possibility. Hawks hated to frighten him like that but he needed to know if Toga had his blood. "I got the knife when I disarmed her. I feel fine but I'll have the lab check it, just to be safe."

"Tell me if you feel wrong." Hawks ordered, because although poison might not be Toga's style, there was still a chance.

He ran up to All Might, who was surveying the battle site with a grave expression. He could not see into Shigaraki's vehicle and could only pray he had not been warped out while they were distracted. As he watched, Moonfish's unconscious body was loaded into another vehicle.

"Which other ones did we get?" he asked more casually then he felt as he nodded towards the recaptured villain.

"We arrested the ones known as Moonfish and Mustard." All Might murmured. "Muscular is..." He glanced towards the dead serial killer and away. "Shigaraki's still in custody."

Hawks released a shuddering breath. "We did it."

He and the voices still weren't relieved. Not with the knowledge that Toga had a host of guards to choose to impersonate.

"*As long as All For One is free, Shigaraki will* ***never*** *stop being a threat."* Green realized.

Hawks did not argue with him. He knew Green spoke only the truth.

He forced his legs to move and knelt beside the fallen sidekick, Royale. The man killed by a sniper bullet that might not have been meant for him. The blood around his wound was already drying, staining his costume red. His blue eyes— blue like the clearest sky— were open, misted in death.

"I'm sorry." Hawks whispered.

He gently closed Royale's eyes and stayed with him until they covered his body with a sheet and took him away.

XXXXXXX

This is what I want, Twice thought as he crouched in the League of Villains' temporary base and watched Kurogiri's mist fade away.

This is what I want, he thought as Toga gleefully approached the captured Heroes and officers, all of them gagged and bound as they eyed the sadistically grinning girl with fear.

This is what I want, Twice repeated as Toga took large quantities of each of their blood and Mr. Compress immediately turned them back to marbles before they could get any ideas.

This is what I want. They accept me here, Twice told himself as Compress collected the marbles, and felt the smallest bit better.

"Where do we put them?" Compress asked.

Dabi had not look the slightest bit bothered by the fearful looks on the Heroes' faces as they vanished. He stretched with his arms over his head and exposed a patch of burnt flesh on his stomach.

"You have enough blood for the plan, Toga?" he asked.

"*More* than enough." she said gleefully, clapping her hands together. She immediately pouted, an adorable expression many would find unnerving due to the blood on her face and sleeves. "I couldn't get any of Hawks's blood though. Him or that Ingenium Hero."

Magne looked up from where she lounged on a crate with her magnet slung over her shoulder but said nothing.

"Ingenium was a target of Stain." Spinner murmured. He gripped his sword briefly before releasing it. "He was proven to be unworthy of being a Hero. I should have faced him and finished Stain's work."

"You'll get your chance." Dabi said in a drawl that was almost bored. "If you have enough blood, Toga, then the Doctor will probably want them."

"But can't I keep one and make friends?" she pleaded.

"We'll see." Dabi rolled his eyes and ruffled her hair, retracting his hand to avoid a swipe of her knife. The move was not quite affectionate but maybe instinctive. Perhaps Dabi had a younger sibling.

"Think the boss will be mad we didn't retrieve Shigaraki?" Twice asked. "We did our best."

"We were terrible." Twice contradicted himself.

"He did not expect All Might himself to be present." Twice defended.

"He totally expected All Might to be present." Twice denied. "Why send that Nomu otherwise?"

"Regardless of whether he expected us to succeed or not, it's on to the next stage." Dabi drawled.

Twice did not know how Dabi became their de-facto leader with Shigaraki out of the picture, but he was not about to complain. Dabi was actually spending time with the League now, and the Doctor and All For One seemed to trust him for some reason.

"We need to split up and lay low." Dabi continued. "The Heroes will be searching for us. We'll meet up at the new place."

"We're not going back to Kurogiri's bar?" Twice asked mournfully. "I liked that place. Though not going back after a fight was smart…"

"He owes me a drink!" Twice ranted.

"Hey." Magne interjected. "There's something you should know about Hawks."

"What is it you want to tell us, Magne?" Twice questioned.

"Spit it out already." Twice grumbled.

Magne leaned back and balanced an arm on her knee. "I know the boss wants Hawks so I tried to use my Quirk to get that Hero away from the fight. There was no affect. Hawks wasn't polarized north or south."

Wait, *what*? All For One *actually* wanted to capture Hawks? Twice hadn't been told that. His stomach twisted with guilt as he realized it was *his* fault but he reminded himself that Magne had failed even as a part of himself began plotting how to keep Birdie away from creepy moldy potato man.

He also realized he was *happy* she'd failed.

Oh dear.

"Was he in range?" Compress asked, puzzled.

Magne raised an incredulous eyebrow at him, stunned he could ask a question with such an obvious answer. "*Yes*. It's unexpected. The only other person I know who isn't affected by my magnetism is myself."

"What does that mean? Why is Hawks immune?" Dabi asked.

Magne shrugged. "Hell if I know. Just thought I'd let you know I can't move Hawks around."

Twice listened absently as Compress muttered something about performance issues under pressure and he and Magne began to argue. Twice considered it good-natured bickering considering no Quirks were being used yet. He watched them in interest until Spinner sidled up next to him.

Twice grinned under his mask. "What's up, lizard man?"

"My name's Spinner." he grumbled. His red eyes flicked towards the other Villains and he leaned close to Twice. "I saw Hawks save you." he murmured. "And I saw you refuse to fight him."

Twice could not deny the twinge of apprehension in his gut as he remembered All For One's… '*friendly reminder'*.

"Maybe I did." Twice admitted.

"I did no such thing." Twice denied.

Spinner mumbled something under his breath and crossed his arms. "I don't mind. Hawks is one of the good Heroes. Stain himself approves of him, so I do too. Even Dabi fought him. So it's nice to see someone else restrain themselves."

No part of Twice knew what to say to that so he merely gave a double thumbs up.

"Thanks for sharing my opinion, buddy!"

"Hey, mind your own business!"

Spinner nodded and smiled hesitantly. It was not a smile of confusion, but of someone unused to interacting with people. Or maybe it was just Twice. Though Spinner did say he used to be a hikikomori. Twice followed Spinner and the rest of the League out of the derelict building, leaving no sign they had been there.

They went their separate ways, but their contacts were all in Twice's phone, reassuring him that they were only a phone call away. He glanced behind him at Dabi and Compress's backs as they left together to go drop off the captured Heroes at wherever All For One was.

Those people are going to become Nomu, aren't they? Twice realized.

He turned away and kept walking.

This is what I want.

This is what I want.

This is what I want.

Right?

XXXXXXX

One step into the seedy bar and Miruko was already on edge. She should be home, but Mockingjay had contacted her hours ago to tell her an old tutor of hers was in town to 'help her study for her finals'. Miruko did not have an appearance or name to go by or even a location. There were only clues that sent her on a field trip across what felt like half of Japan and some coded phrases to use once she reached her destination… which was supposedly this grimy bar.

She'd rather Mockingjay come herself to introduce them but knew that was not the point.

This was Miruko's first test.

Ugh. If I wanted tests I would go back to school.

Miruko huffed and made sure her ears were tucked in her hat before approaching the bar. The bartender glanced her way and she smiled.

"Could I have a single malt whiskey, please? Strongest one you've got."

"Coming right up." the bartender said.

He walked to the drinks and poured one, setting it in front of her before being called to another patron. Miruko picked it up and inspected it, but did not drink, nose twitching at the smell.

"Is that drink for me, darling?" a male voice drawled.

Miruko immediately identified the accent as American and turned her head, eyeing the man who sat beside her critically. He was middle-aged, with straight blond hair and piercing blue eyes, his chin covered with a layer of stubble that reminded her a bit of Eraserhead. His clothing was casual, a simple jacket, shirt, and jeans of varying blues, except for the cowboy hat atop his head.

"It depends." she hedged, keeping her fingers wrapped around the glass to either shove it at him or break it over his head. "Why should I give my drink to a guy like you?"

He chuckled. "Well, I heard from a birdie that you need some friends, and helping a useless drunk get some alcohol in his system might be a nice start."

Miruko's heart began pounding. "I think helping a useless drunk get home would be better."

He barked a laugh and grinned at her. "Well, you're doing good at the whole helping part. But that attitude of yours will get you nowhere."

It was the final part of the code Mockingjay gave Miruko.

She gave him the drink.

He inclined his head at her and took a swig. "Very nice. The name's Haymitch. Hero name: Ricochet. I taught Mockingjay all she knows about making connections."

"You taught her how to manipulate people." Miruko said bluntly.

"Yes." he said, equally blunt. "I taught her to survive and stay outta the cage the Capitol tried to trap her in."

Miruko repressed a wince. She only knew bits and pieces of Mockingjay's past but she had enough information to know Katniss's Hero partner— Finnick Odair, Poseidon— had not been so free.

Logically, she knew they should get right to business since this man had come halfway across the world to help her.

Miruko was not the most logical, business-orientated person.

"You don't want to see her?"

"Nah." he lifted his drink to his lips. "If she wanted to see me, she would've showed up here with you. She's skittish when it comes to people she cares about so I'll let her come to me. Maybe she'll bring her little brother along and we can have a family reunion."

Hawks. "You know about him?"

He raised an eyebrow at her as if the answer should be obvious. "I've been kept up to date. Gotta know who needs protectin'. Speaking of..." He put his drink down and leaned forward. "I've heard about the club you're joining. My job is to make your new buddies like you."

"I know how to make people like me." Miruko muttered.

"Maybe." Ricochet acknowledged. "But you're going to be entering a political minefield. You need more than determination and hard kicks to maneuver through that, sweetheart."

Somehow, being called that by him did not bother her at all. Perhaps it was because it almost seemed… *fatherly* coming from him, even if he did not know it. Or maybe he did know and was purposely acting in a trustworthy way.

Damn it, this was why Miruko hated subterfuge. She'd take punching and kicking things any day over this bull.

Before she could reply, Ricochet's eyes grew cold. "People get pissy when their beliefs are challenged, and you gotta know when to push and when to pretend to fold. You have to learn how to use every person you meet to your advantage. You're headed into a pool of sharks and you can't spread blood in the water without expecting something to bite you. It's true some of the sharks might be friendly, but don't you *ever* forget why you're really there."

"I won't." Miruko growled.

Ricochet cocked his head in a way that was both mocking and knowing. "Make sure you remember that, sweetheart. Now..." He grinned. "Let's head to a less drab place and work on not calling your new friends 'psychos'."

XXXXXXX

After checking in with Ingenium to make sure he was alright, Hawks spent the remainder of the day doing the missions he'd 'missed'. As the day passed and the sunset turned into a starry night, he made sure Miruko was still out on her own mission before deciding to go home.

It was late at night and although he could fly, he found himself walking, just short of dragging his feet. He was just delaying the inevitable and he knew it. In all honesty, he should just turn around and walk into Commission HQ while offering his blood for the sacrifice. The voices would probably stop him using force if he tried.

"*You should go to Mockingjay's."* Pink said.

"*Best Jeanist has a stick up his ass but he'd help you."* Orange growled.

"*Or go to Tensei's. His door is always open."* Silver added.

No, Hawks told them. *I know the Commission's waiting for me. If I go somewhere else I'll only drag more people into my problems and delay the inevitable.*

"You don't have to let them hurt you." Green said fiercely.

So what do I do then? Hawks demanded. *Let them get Rumi killed? Let them look into Tokoyami and realize he knows something he shouldn't? Tell the world the truth and bring Hero Society down with them? If Endeavor's actions can make it collapse, theirs **definitely** will. I'm their property and I won't let others fall with me.*

The voices kept arguing but Hawks would not be swayed. As he walked, he tried to shove them into their dorm but they realized what he was doing and fought, popping back into his conscious mind like literal intrusive thoughts. Hawks eventually decided to simply block them out as much as he could, ignoring their protests that '*he didn't need to do this*'. To his relief— but not surprise— none of them even thought about using Purple's Quirk to make him listen. In another instance, he might feel touched that they actually kept their word about that.

Hawks dithered as much as he dared before slowly heading up to Miruko's apartment. He could have gone through the window, but he had a better chance of dodging if he went

through the front entrance. Hawks carefully put his key in the lock and stopped, staring at the smooth, opaque wood between him and what used to be safety.

If the Commission reconditions me, what will happen to them?

Suddenly, entering that apartment did not seem like such a good idea anymore.

He knew someone was waiting on the other side. He *knew* it was a Commission lackey sent to drag him off to be punished or interrogated. If he let that happen, the voices would suffer with him. Wanting to avoid punishment was not selfish this time because he had people he needed to protect.

But he also knew he had no choice. He could not run or delay the inevitable.

So Hawks took a breath and slowly opened the door. The lights were off, with the only illumination coming from the street light outside. He cautiously turned on the light, revealing the interior of the apartment.

There was no one inside.

Hawks did not relax.

He cautiously sent out feathers to scout the area, praying his paranoia was for nothing.

There was a low *whirr* like a flying drone.

Something clamped around Hawks's wings and metal pieces stabbed into them, locking them together. The force of the attack threw him forward and although he managed to roll, the loss of balance sent him crumpling to the ground.

His wings felt like they were on *fire*, and he desperately tried to detach more feathers, only to realize he couldn't as an odd feeling trickled through his wings similar to how they felt when Eraserhead used his Quirk on them. The feathers he had been controlling fluttered uselessly to the ground, as mundane as the average bird's. His first— delusional— horrified thought was that one of the Villains had followed him home.

"It's nothing personal, kid." A low voice said pleasantly. "Even more than usual."

Hawks *grabbed* the voices' presences and shoved them into their dorm, locking them inside.

He did not know how he did it.

He just *did* because no one else would suffer because of him.

Amplifier stepped into view, the remote used to guide the clamps held loosely in his left hand. In his right was no weapon, but Hawks knew he did not need one. Ignoring the pain in his wings, he forced himself to his feet, keeping away from Amplifier. His trainer's posture radiated disappointment.

"Why did you lower your guard? I taught you better than that."

Hawks did not reply. He pushed past the pain and got to his feet, forcing himself to breathe lightly and not jostle his wings too much.

"You always were a fighter." Amplifier noted. "But this time you might wanna stay down."

Hawks had no intention to listen because he had *not* stepped over the line, he had stepped off the edge of a cliff, and was falling with no way to get back up. He'd gone too far and he knew it, but he couldn't let the Commission do what they wanted this time since he was not the only one who would get hurt. He had to fight.

For them.

Unable to use his wings, Hawks threw a lamp at Amplifier's head. His trainer predictably ducked and Hawks tackled him, sending them both into the couch and knocking it over. The other lamp fell with them, shattering, and Hawks twisted, shoving Amplifier into the shards. It was dirty and unheroic, but he could not let the Commission capture him— and with him, the voices.

He had no plan. He knew it. He was recklessly acting on instinct alone. He was doing *everything* the Commission taught him not to.

But they taught him to fight in defense of others, and his friends should not have to pay for his decisions. They were *innocent*.

Amplifier knew none of this. The Commission knew none of this.

Hawks would do everything he could to ensure they never found out.

He grabbed Amplifier in a chokehold, mindful to keep him pinned down just like his trainers taught him. His skin was covered, as was Amplifier's, making him unable to use his Quirk. Amplifier chuckled as he coughed, and Hawks had the feeling he was grinning under his mask.

"I taught you so well, kid." He praised him as he choked. "But you're not as smart as you think you are."

Pain.

It ripped up Hawks's spine and turned his vision white. His sight returned in time for a fist to fill his vision. The pain the Quirk-amplified blow caused made it feel more like getting shot than merely struck. Hawks clutched at his eye, mind unable to comprehend that there was no blood as his body screamed that he'd been badly injured.

Amplifier kicked him in the gut and it felt like at least ten blades had stabbed into his stomach. The pain radiated outward like cracks tearing through his body. Hawks fell, barely able to draw breath as his mind—and maybe the voices— shouted at him to get up.

Amplifier didn't need skin to skin contact to use his Quirk?

Hawks forced himself back onto his hands and knees as he retched, shaking violently. He did not bother to back away from Amplifier, staying stock still as his trainer approached.

"Let's not beat around the bush. We know you're some kind of Nomu." Amplifier murmured. "You don't even seem to realize you're a bomb set to go off. Well, I *hope* you don't." He crouched and gently brushed Hawks's hair out of his face. "How did the League break you, kid?"

So that's what the Commission President is saying.

"I'm *not* a Nomu. The League didn't do anything to me." Hawks croaked. "The President sent you here because I disobeyed her and she's *petty*."

Even as he said it, a part of him recoiled as he insulted the woman who had given him so much. But groveling at her feet and singing her praises would not help save his friends. Still, he didn't know why he bothered.

Amplifier sighed. "We both know that isn't true. We know you have *at least* two Quirks. You probably thought you were being sneaky, making one of our agents forget about that vendor. But we have ways to pick blocked memories from people's minds." His fingers quivered, and if Hawks did not know better, he would swear Amplifier was genuinely upset. "*Please* don't make us do that to you. I don't want you dead, kid."

Only because you spent so much time training me, Hawks knew. He did not say it.

"Just cooperate. The Commission President knows how much you've given for us. She can be lenient. I don't even need to take you in, just see your new abilities so we can see where they came from. Come on, show me those Quirks." Amplifier spoke patiently, as if Hawks was merely struggling to do a simple trick. "They're in your feathers, aren't they? The tests we ran to see what they are came up negative so I just need you to activate them for me and this little machine on your wings will record them so we can find some matches. If you don't I'll have to bring you to the lab and you won't leave with just a few new scars. The President's considering that you need to be a bit more… compliant." He leaned close to whisper in Hawks's ear. "I'm not supposed to say this, but first she plans to leave you with Kaetsu for a few weeks to make you 'appreciate the Commission's kindness'. But that's not necessary. *Is it*, kid?"

Hawks felt bile rise in his throat. He remained silent and was almost grateful he could not even twitch his wings in distress.

"Hawks, *please*." Amplifier begged. "Just *cooperate* with me. Prove you're still a Hero. Prove you still care about protecting people."

"I am a Hero." Hawks stated, breath stuttering as pain flared through his wings. "And I *am* protecting people."

Amplifier sighed and the energy seemed to drain from him along with his breath. "*Damn you* for making me invest myself in you, kid. I *can't* give you to them to rip apart."

Hawks stared at his handler in disbelief. Was he actually going to help—?

"This is for you own good."

Amplifier seemed to brace himself, visibly conflicted for the first time since Hawks met him.

Then his hand latched around Hawks's neck.

Hawks thought he knew what Amplifier's touch felt like.

He thought he knew the limits of his trainer's Quirk.

He was *wrong*.

Hawks could not find the breath to scream. All the air had been ripped out of his lungs, leaving them shuddering and spasming as his ribs threatened to squeeze them to pulp. Every nerve ending felt like it was being individually electrocuted, his insides tearing into paper-thin shreds as white-hot claws tore through them. His veins turned purple and bulged out of his skin, like someone had taken poison and injected it into his blood vessels until they were close to bursting. Hawks always thought Amplifier could merely simulate pain, but the evidence disproving that naive misconception was all too real.

If this was what Amplifier considered mercy, Hawks didn't want it.

A choked scream managed to tear its way from Hawks's throat, raw and painful like that of a dying animal. Amplifier covered his mouth and grimaced.

"Why are you making me hurt you, kid?" he asked shakily. "Use your Quirks. That's *all* I need. Just a *blip*. You realize all you're doing is protecting your torturers, right? If you aren't our enemy, you have nothing to hide."

The voices were stirring, drawn out by Hawks's agony. He struggled to keep them inside the safety of their dorms, because if all of them felt what he did and their mixed mental state caused them to drown, they might go mad. He felt them emerge and shielded them with everything he had because he could bear to see himself hurt but not them *never* them—

He felt Orange's fury and Green's protectiveness rising.

Don't use your Quirks!

"*Gold—"*

Don't!

Hawks shoved them back into the dorm and locked the door. He heard them banging on it but did not let them out. He would not let Amplifier touch them. He would not use their Quirks. The Commission would never harm them. Never. Not even for a *second*.

It was that mantra that kept Hawks going as *hours-minutes-days-seconds* passed.

He could hear the voices banging desperately on the door.

Thud thud thud.

Hawks might have ordered them to stay away.

Eventually, he could not tell anymore.

All that was left was pain.

After what felt like hours, Amplifier stopped. By the time he did, Hawks could barely move, let alone fight. He hardly felt the pain in his wings anymore. It was nothing but a minor prick compared to the metal shards piercing and slicing his nerves.

Thud thud thud.

"You realize I'm going to have to take you in, kid?" Amplifier said quietly. "Considering what they did to you, maybe remedial courses will be a mercy."

Hawks's eyes fluttered but he clung to consciousness. He could let Amplifier take him. He *could* pretend to be a spy. He *could* pretend to break. He *could* give up all the information he had and let the Heroes take out All For One and his Nomu factory.

But that solution had too many flaws to count, the biggest of which was the voices would fall with him. Hawks did not want them to die for nothing. Especially not because of him.

He tried to rise but Amplifier grabbed him again, turning his vision white. In his mind, he could still hear the voices desperately trying to get out.

Thud thud thud.

Thud thud thud.

Thud thud ***thud.***

Amplifier clamped a hand over Hawks's mouth, body going stiff.

Thud thud-thud .

A few more knocks came through the door.

Not desperate, but enthusiastic.

Not frantic, but polite.

They were coming from the *real* door.

And they were followed by a voice.

"Hey, listener! It's Present Mic! Your friend said you were home. Could you let me in? I have to talk with you about something I think you're gonna love!"

Amplifier kept his hand over Hawks's mouth. Hawks could feel his handler's heartbeat, steady but quick.

What was Present Mic doing here—?

It didn't matter why.

Someone was *right there*.

Hawks struggled feebly against Amplifier's hold, trying to make some type of noise. Amplifier's grip tightened in warning but Hawks could not lay there and give in. His booted foot lifted and smacked into the hardwood floor with a *thunk*. Amplifier's hand squeezed tighter over his mouth.

"Shhh." he murmured. "This is your last chance to be a good Hero now…"

A shudder went through Hawks but he disobeyed. He knew he would suffer for it but he *fought*. He kept struggling as much as he could, kicking and wriggling as Amplifier's hand muffled his screams. Amplifier's Quirk greyed out his vision but he didn't let the world fade away. He heard muffled voices through the door— There was *more than one person out there.*— too soft to decipher.

Force open the door, Hawks thought. *Something's wrong. You can tell.* ***Come in***.

The voices grew softer, then stopped completely.

Icy panic grasped Hawks's throat, choking him with its intensity. *Don't leave. Please don't leave.*

He heard the telltale sound of receding footsteps.

They did not come back.

The naive, *stupid* hope drained from Hawks's body, leaving him hollow and cold.

Amplifier scoffed. "See? I taught you better than to think others will help. Heroes don't need Heroes, kid."

Hawks weakly shoved at his arm only to go into convulsions as the pain spread further. He lurched— partly because of the seizure and partly out of desperation— and his hand caught Amplifier's cloth mask, tearing it and exposing a single indigo eye. At his continued— futile — resistance, Amplifier's calm facade snapped and he grabbed Hawks's hair, giving him a forceful shake.

"Stop. *Struggling!*"

His Quirk activated and Hawks *screamed*.

Thud.

Amplifier's head jerked to the left in time for a gloved fist to meet his face. He toppled off of Hawks but rolled, only to be shoved backwards into the wall. The force of the impact must have burst some pipes because water sprayed from the walls, dousing Amplifier in the face and making him splutter as it pooled on the floor.

Something slammed into the apartment door and Hawks thought he heard a muffled curse. Another bang sounded, followed by the *crunch* of splintering wood. In his peripheral, Hawks thought he saw the door nearly twist off its hinges. Amplifier instantly bolted for the open window, leg jolting slightly as he stepped in the growing puddle of water as if something had somehow grasped his foot, and then he was gone.

Hawks lifted his head to stare at his rescuer.

Ennea stared back.

Their black costume disguised their figure and their dotted mask covered their face but their posture screamed fury. Before Hawks could do more than gasp, they vanished out the window after Amplifier.

...Guys?

"We're a-all in here." Green stammered.

"The hell?!"

Hawks flinched and turned his head, spotting yellow hair first. Present Mic shook himself out of his shock and rushed to his side. Beside him, Aizawa hesitated, gaze darting towards the window. Hawks locked eyes with him, pleading. The underground Hero got the message. He turned and jumped out the window after Amplifier and the other Ennea.

There was *another* Ennea, who was *not* him or any of the voices.

Hawks was pretty sure he had gone into the medical type of shock, because he did not feel much except dull bewilderment.

Present Mic jolted out of his shock and ran to Hawks's side, crouching beside him. "*Shi*— Are you alright?"

Hawks stared at him tiredly. He belatedly noticed he was shaking violently, his bruised arms and clamped wings shuddering in his peripheral vision. His gaze drifted along the veins inside his left forearm, noting how poisoned they looked.

"Let's get that thing off you." Mic said hastily.

He touched the device and Hawks stifled another scream as it pulled at his wings.

Present Mic recoiled, removing his hands from the device and holding them high in the air. "*Shit*, I didn't—" His skin paled a few shades. "Is that thing *in* your wings?"

Hawks nodded weakly.

Present Mic turned green but he whipped out his phone, calling an ambulance before Hawks could try to stop him. "Let's get you to the hospital to get that off of you."

Hawks did not respond. A numb feeling washed though him, taking away even his lingering pain, and he stared blankly at the ceiling, keeping silent as Mic tried to coax answers out of him. Even when the Hero realized Hawks was not going to tell him who attacked him, Mic continued to speak, soothing him like he was nothing more than another frightened vict— civilian.

Slowly, Hawks mind began working again, and he realized what had just happened.

Present Mic was here.

He and Aizawa had seen Amplifier.

They had *seen* what he'd done.

Hawks's thoughts jolted into action as he went over stories and excuses.

The mysterious attacker he definitely did not know was a stalker.

The mysterious attacker he definitely did not know was an old enemy seeking revenge.

The mysterious attacker he definitely did not know was a member of the League of Villains, possibly.

The mysterious attacker he definitely did not know was an anti-mutant bigot.

That man was *not* a Commission agent. He was *not* sent here to punish Hawks for disobeying, under the false pretense that Hawks was a Nomu when in reality the Commission President was just a petty witch.

The Commission would not let Hawks get away with this— Amplifier would report his further rebellious actions soon enough— but that did not mean he could let the Heroes figure out who was responsible.

Hawks could do this. He could weave a tale and things would go back to norm—

Hawks remembered Aizawa knew about the Commission already.

He *knew* they had hurt Hawks before.

And they *would* again, because he had fought back instead of accepting his fate and giving them what they wanted like a good little Hero.

Hawks realized then that he could never go back.

He had taken a step and fallen off the cliff into the abyss.

Things would never be 'normal' again.

What have I done?

Hawks turned his head away from Present Mic and blocked out his worthless sympathy, shoulders shaking.

He still did not cry.

The voices wordlessly shifted, enveloping him in their presences in what could be considered a hug. Their sorrow tore at Hawks's mind like ice-cold claws and he blinked rapidly.

However, with that sorrow came hope, because he would *not* lose everything. He still had those he'd fought to protect, his identity and mind, and the mission they gave him. As long as he breathed and was out of the Commission's grasp, he still had something to fight for.

So as Hawks tried not to move and waited for the ambulance to arrive, he let the voices' warmth bolster him, reminding him why he did not crumble before the will of his owners.

No matter what the future brought, no matter what the Commission did and what happened to him, he knew it was worth it.

Playing the Game

Dabi felt no regret as he handed All For One the captured Heroes.

He felt nothing but boredom as All For One inspected them like a child receiving new toys.

He watched the Villain turn the marbles between his fingers, a not-quite smile on his face without the slightest hint of discomfort until put them aside to deal with later.

"The Doctor will be happy. He's been so despondent since Tomura was captured."

Dabi *highly* doubted that. "Good for him. So when are we breaking Shigaraki out?"

"Soon, but not yet. There are some things that need to be done first. I also have a doctor's appointment so I will be busy for a few days." All For One's back was to him, his reflection distorted in the black screens he faced, but Dabi could see the slightest hint of a smile in those cracked, scarred lips. He could feel All For One observing him, searching for any hint of weakness. "Do you have an issue with that?"

Dabi shrugged, bored and unconcerned by the news. "Nah. I expected as much."

It was obvious that the real plan was to cause a mass breakout at Tartarus, not to save Shigaraki specifically. All For One wanted a dramatic chaos play to throw Hero Society off its pedestal, not a rescue of a supposed 'beloved' successor.

Dabi knew Shigaraki was no longer needed by All For One to be a successor. He could tell by how the Villain acted. His legacy was no longer needed so he cast it aside. Endeavor had been similarly dismissive of Touya and his other children when he discovered Shoto would be his new project.

Despite himself, Dabi wondered if Hawks knew *that* little detail about the Todorokis. He wondered what the look on his face had been when he saw Endeavor's children were the projects of selective breeding. The Winged Hero knew all about being groomed for heroism.

After Twice's little rant, Dabi had done his research because if that Hero knew his weaknesses, he wanted to know Hawks's. What he found was… not completely unexpected. He tried not to think about it. The differences outnumbered the similarities but Dabi looked at Hawks's leash and wondered what the eldest son of Endeavor would have become if Touya had not died. He'd like to believe he would still leave the first chance he got but would he? Or would he be another caged bird?

This was why Dabi did not think about the past and what ifs. Only the future. But then that damn Winged Hero had to run in and make the same mistakes Touya had by trying to expose Endeavor legally. Tried but failed, sabotaged by his fellow Pro Heroes. It was almost pitiable. Was Hawks so stupid that he thought Endeavor could be stopped through legal action? How *adorable*. The broken bird still had some naivety left even as the hand that fed it clipped its torn up wings.

Dabi was almost tempted to watch and see that naive idealism whittle away to nothing. *Almost*, because he was not All For One and the thought of listening to his 'guidance' made his burnt skin crawl. Dabi was not dumb. He'd seen enough manipulative men in his life to recognize All For One wanted to mold him into something else just for the fun of it. The old bastard could keep on trying. Endeavor could not forge Touya into a Hero and All For One would not make Dabi another easily-discarded apprentice. Dabi had his *own* goals.

Hero Society deserved to be burned to cinders along with everyone complicit in its corruption. Those Heroes he gave All For One would be stripped off their Quirks and killed if they were lucky. They would be new Nomu if they were unlucky. Dabi did not care. He did not owe Hawks or *anyone* anything.

He was free of his past but his future only had one outcome.

He knew his path and he would follow it to its fiery end.

XXXXXXX

Hawks did not remember going to the hospital. Nor did he remember the device being removed from his wings. When the grey, fuzzy world gained color again, he was laying in a hospital bed with his wings bandaged and purple bruises all over his skin. He considered the white ceiling above him with a detached type of exhaustion and shut his eyes again, taking a shuddering breath.

I have to leave.

"*No, Gold—"*

Yes, Hawks interrupted Green. *The Commission won't stop. I know it will make the future more difficult to change but I* ***have*** *to go. We'll become Ennea full-time and keep in contact with Aizawa and Rumi or something—*

"*We cannot leave in such a way."* Silver's distress was so strong Hawks had to double-check to be sure the walls were still there.*"Surely running will only make you seem more guilty—"*

"*Are you* ***blind****?"* Orange snapped. *"The Commission* ***doesn't care*** *about guilt, or Nomu, or the damn League. They're just pissy Gold stood up to them and fought back."*

Hawks recalled their successful transfer of Shigaraki and some of the tightness in his chest eased. He remembered that, for the moment, he was still free and the voices were still okay.

He smiled. *It was worth it.*

A tap on the door sent him jolting upright as the monitor attached to him beeped frantically.

In the doorway, Detective Tsukauchi raised his hands in a peaceful motion.

"It's just me. And I'm not here to hurt you."

"I didn't think you were." Hawks said defensively. He forced a smile. "How many times do I have to tell you we need to stop meeting like this?"

"Many." Tsukauchi said dryly.

He sat in one of the empty chairs, and Hawks belatedly realized that Miruko was not there. His breath caught in his throat and he felt nonexistent pockets for his phone.

"Is Rumi okay?" he blurted before Tsukauchi could speak.

The detective's face betrayed none of his thoughts at Hawks's undeniably frantic question. "We've been unable to contact her but according to the Hero Network, she's chasing a thief at the moment."

"So—" *—the Commission hasn't hurt her?* "—she doesn't know about me?"

"No. She hasn't been told about the attack in her apartment—"

"What about Fumikage Tokoyami?" Hawks asked rapidly. "Is he okay?"

Tsukauchi gave him a searching look. "He's at school now. It's Tuesday morning."

Hawks checked the date and time on his phone and realized he was right.

Tsukauchi leaned forward and clasped his hands, balancing his elbows on his thighs. "You're afraid they're going to be hurt in retaliation for what you did, aren't you? I guess you disobeyed the Commission to help with Shigaraki's transfer."

Hawks's wings stiffened and he kept his expression blank. He realized there must be some type of morphine in that IV drip because he only felt a dull ache in them instead of excruciating pain. Though after what he just experienced, not a lot of pain could compare to what Amplifier was capable of. Hawks looked down at his hands— which were still lined with swollen purple veins— and resisted the instinct to hide them under his blanket.

"I thought as much. Would you tell me what happened?" Tsukauchi asked gently.

There was no point in denying what Amplifier had done. Aizawa and Mic had probably already given their reports and the evidence was all over Hawks's pale, bruised skin. He needed to ask someone for makeup so he could cover the injuries up.

"*Why?"* Pink asked, uncharacteristically sharp. *"They already know."*

Hawks locked his muscles so he would not recoil.

"It won't change anything." he said stoically in response to both of them.

"But keeping it to yourself will not change anything either." Tsukauchi countered sternly.

Hawks had to hold in a hysterical giggle because this was sounding a *lot* like his old arguments with the voices and their time travel secrecy. He remembered the near-outcome of

the one time he tried to tell someone about the future— as in 'nearly getting sent to a psych ward'— and felt his lips press thin.

"I'm fine. What happened was an isolated incident. Nothing needs to be done."

Tsukauchi sighed. "I would appreciate it if you were honest."

Hawks flinched and averted his eyes.

Tsukauchi did not relent, though he did lower his gaze, as if he realized Hawks would not appreciate being scrutinized. "Your attacker was from the Commission, wasn't he?" He frowned darkly. "Was it 'Amplifier', the one with the pain-enhancing Quirk?"

Hawks could not give him an answer, but his silence revealed the truth all the same.

Tsukauchi hesitated, and put a gentle hand on his arm. "Hawks, we won't le—"

"*Stop*." Hawks whispered. He wanted to sound angry but knew he just sounded tired. "You *can't* protect me. I'm already doomed." His fingers dug into the sheets covering his legs. "But I'm not going to lay down and let them recondition me. I have people to protect so I'm going to last as long as I can."

"We *will* help you." Tsukauchi stated. He lifted his head, revealing his eyes, and in the shadow cast by the brim of his hat they almost appeared to be burning. Despite the difference in color, they reminded Hawks of All Might. That comparison did not sooth him. "The Commission will *not* be allowed to get away with this, do you hear me?"

Hawks did not reply and stared stonily at the wall behind Tsukauchi's head.

Tsukauchi sighed. "Moving on to your rescuer… It appears Ennea was keeping an eye on you."

"Yeah." Hawks murmured. "Did Aizawa catch them?"

Tsukauchi shook his head. "Both the Vigilante and your attacker vanished."

Hawks struggled not to frown. "I didn't see them use any Quirks though."

"That may be true for this incident, but they used it in their rescue of Eri, meaning they have partaken in vigilantism." Tsukauchi reminded him. "Plus there have been reports of them apprehending criminals."

Hawks had not known that. Well, of course he knew about *his and the voices'* Ennea's missions, but how long had that other Ennea been out there? Had they been making arrests that had been attributed to the original Ennea?

"*At least they seem to be an ally."* Silver said.

"*Or simply an enemy of the Commission."* Red mused.

"*Ally or not, we don't know who they are."* Purple countered. *"We can't trust them with using Ennea's identity just because they saved us once."*

Green began muttering to himself about all the possible people that could be behind the mask. Pink and White listened in interest while Orange growled in exaggerated annoyance. They could all tell he was interested too.

"Hawks?" He was pulled out of his thoughts by Tsukauchi's voice. The detective's expression was stern. "Do you know who Ennea is and why they saved you?"

Hawks did not need to forget to be able to tell the truth this time. "No idea."

"Okay." Tsukauchi said quietly. He rose from his chair. "Aizawa will be back in a few minutes. He had to go to work. Would you rather I stay in here or go outside with the guard detail?"

Oh. So Hawks had a *guard detail* now. Fan-freaking-tastic.

What was the point of them anyway? They'd be gone within the week because of some arbitrary mission the Commission *totally* did not send them, making them too busy to 'waste time volunteering' to help Hawks.

Stop whining. You brought this on yourself.

"The Commission doesn't have a Quirk that lets them walk through walls, so I should be fine." Hawks joked weakly. He glanced towards the door and back to Tsukauchi. "Do I know who's out there?"

"Fatgum and Ingenium."

Hawks almost wished he did not recognize his temporary guards. That would make things less…

Embarrassing horrifying, shameful, pathetic, ***it's your fault. They're going to blame you*** *—*

…uncomfortable.

"Do they know?" he did not mean to whisper, but his voice lowered anyway.

"Both do."

Hawks nodded slowly and bottled up the shame he felt that even more Heroes knew how weak he actually was. He blocked out the voices' angry protests that he was *not* weak because were Heroes like All Might in a hospital bed because an old handler ambushed and beat him up at home? No. Hawks did not want to face either of them but he knew his only choice was which one would watch over him inside this room.

"Can you send Ingenium in?" Hawks requested. "And, um... Could you maybe send a distant relative to the Tokoyami household for a bit? And maybe Iida and Todorokis too, if they don't mind?"

He knew Endeavor *would* mind the offer of a 'relative' staying over for a while but he had to at least *try*. Even though the Iidas were a family of Heroes and Endeavor was… Endeavor, one could never be too careful. Hawks's guards would not last long but he had to make sure his interns had some protection.

Tsukauchi got his meaning and inclined his head. "I will do what I can."

He walked out and Ingenium came in a few seconds later. Hawks realized his helmet was off and carefully avoided looking at him, focusing on prodding at his blanket instead. He did not want to see the pity or anger on Ingenium's face. Rather than greet Hawks, the armored Hero set his helmet down, walked right up to his bedside and…

…gave him a fierce but notably soft hug?

Huh?

Hawks floundered for a moment, uncertain on what to do, and awkwardly patted his armored shoulder. "Uh, hi to you too?"

Tensei did not release him. "I'm sorry."

"Okay...?" Hawks asked hesitantly. "Why?"

Tensei squeezed him tighter, careful to avoid touching his injured wings. "I've been told about your… guardians and upbringing. I should have realized something wasn't right. I shouldn't have let you go home. I should have investigated."

Where the heck was this coming from?

"You were only seventeen when they recruited me." Hawks pointed out. "You couldn't have stopped them."

"But I became a Hero soon after. I've been a Hero for more than a decade and I *never* realized what the Commission was doing behind the scenes. I've worked beside them and their agents but I never saw *anything* amiss."

The regret in Tensei's voice unbalanced Hawks, and he was torn between comforting the older Hero and bluntly asking him why he cared so much. The latter would probably be taken the wrong way at the moment so he kept it to himself.

Tensei's skin drained of color. Hawks instantly folded his damaged wings around the other Hero, shielding him as he frantically searched for the threat, but nothing was out of place in the white hospital room. He looked back at Tensei in confusion and saw tears in the corners of his eyes.

"That day we went to the movies you moved as if you were injured. You covered the bruises they gave you with cosmetics, didn't you?"

Hawks opened his mouth to lie, and accidentally met the eyes of the older brother that Silver admired so much. He faltered, caught by the familiar grasp of deep-rooted shame, but did not

drop his gaze. "Yeah."

Tensei was the one who looked away. "I'm so *sorry*, Hawks."

Hawks pulled a Miruko and lightly jabbed him in the arm. "Hey, why are *you* apologizing? You shouldn't blame yourself. The Commission is efficient at what they do— keeping the public safe— but they're also good at keeping other Heroes in the dark about their… uh… strict side. And it's not like I was screaming 'help me' from the rooftops…"

This scenario was slowly becoming more and more deja vu-like. Hawks felt White shift uncomfortably and put the pieces together. He felt his expression go blank.

My parents sold me to the Commission.

"*Yes."* Pink confirmed, voice choked.

I was groomed to be a Hero.

"*That's right."* Green said softly.

The training was… brutal. And more than what should be done to a child. It's… ***wrong*** .

"*Indeed."* Silver murmured.

Hurting a child like that…

Hawks remembered isolation in cold white walls. He remembered fear so great he could not pull enough air into his lungs. He remembered pain so fierce he dare not cry, knowing that would only make it worse. He remembered the day he received that first 'debt' payment and realized he would never be able to escape. He remembered Kae—

...It's abuse. I was abused.

"*You still are."* White stated. *"They call it 'training' and 'punishment', but it's* ***abuse****. And you do* ***not*** *deserve it."*

Hawks blinked rapidly and took a shuddering breath. He saw Tensei was looking at him, a worried crease between his eyebrows, but could not muster a smile.

He forced a laugh instead. "Sorry. Just, uh. Had some thoughts… about things." He was not sure what to do so he laughed again. "I thought it was *normal*, you know? Even after I met Rumi and she started pointing out what was concerning, I still didn't think it was *wrong* for them to do that to me." He put his head in his hands. "*Why* am I bothering to tell you this? If you try to do something they'll kill you too."

"They've killed people who tried to help?" Tensei asked, voice strangled.

"Not for me." *Though they might be trying with Rumi.* Hawks bit his lip so hard he felt it bleed. "…I think?"

His phone gave a loud beep and both he and Tensei jumped. Hawks fumbled for his phone and saw a notification pop up on the screen. It was a text from Mockingjay.

'*Turn on the news.*'

Hawks fumbled for the remote and turned it to the news station. He spotted the breaking news banner on the bottom of the screen first and his stomach tried to crawl out of his throat.

'*UA Heroes Save Hawks During Brutal Home Attack*'

Filling a majority of the rest of the screen was a video. The footage was clearly from a cell phone camera, shaky and grainy, but Hawks could clearly see himself being carried out of Miruko's apartment building on a stretcher. His mind seemed to drift away from his body and he watched in muffled, perplexed curiosity as his video self was loaded into an ambulance and driven away.

"*—footage was taken at two thirty-four by a neighbor who wishes to remain anonymous."* newscaster Daikaku Miyagi was saying. *"He claims he began the recording when he went to investigate after hearing screams and the sounds of a struggle. The police have told MNN News that the perpetrator ambushed Hawks with a banned Quirk-suppressing device after he came home at approximately ten o'clock last night. Based on reports from the incident, the perpetrator used a pain-enhancing Quirk to torture Hawks for several hours before Pro Heroes Present Mic and Eraserhead arrived at the scene. Investigators theorize the perpetrator is a stalker, though they also claim he may be a member of the League of Villains seeking revenge for the capture of their leader. Another possibility is he is part of an organization responsible for Hawks's disappearance last year. Claims about a former stalker of Hawks being released from prison have only inflamed the rumors."*

The screen changed to interviews from the streets, the first of which was a young man with spiral-like hair. *"Heroes always protect us, but who protects **them**, ya know?"* The man looked troubled. *"I've never thought about it before."*

"*Why hasn't anyone taken this League out already?"* another man demanded. *"[Bleep] Stain and his [bleep] philosophy! They're nothing more than murderous cowards!"*

"It's scary to think about." A woman wrung her hands together, twisting them nervously. *"I mean, if Heroes can't protect **themselves**... what chance do we have?"*

"*He was attacked **in his apartment.**"* Another woman emphasized, her expression twisted with horror. *"And it took **hours** for the Heroes to help him. They weren't even called! Were all his neighbors [bleep]ing **deaf**?"*

Hawks should turn it off. He *really* should. Instead the remote slipped from his fingers and he shakily grabbed for his phone. For the second time, Hawks broke the rule of not looking himself up on the internet. He was trending in Japan and it looked like the rest of the world was beginning to notice.

Many wanted updates on his status, with the question 'Is Hawks dead?' already becoming a top search result on Moogle along with fake reports and articles about his 'tragic death'.

Others put forth theories and compiled their own 'evidence' linking the incident to his disappearance as they dug as much as they could to try to figure out who was responsible.

But still others wanted to find someone to blame, and since Amplifier was unknown, they blamed the Heroes for being late, Miruko's neighbors for not acting, Miruko for not being home, and even Hawks himself for 'not fighting hard enough'.

Seeing those last two groups hurt, even though he knew to expect it. He was a Hero. His weakness wasn't supposed to be exposed like this. But here they were.

Orange made a disgusted noise. *"You know, one of the things I didn't miss in the future was **this** shit. You fought as hard as you could. Don't let anyone tell you differently."*

I— Hawks considered the voices and swallowed. *I managed to keep you a secret. You're safe. I succeeded in protecting you.*

"*That's right."* Orange growled, pleased.

On the screen, Miyagi put a hand to his ear. *"This just in! Our own Yūka Maki is outside Fukuoka General Hospital now, where she's gotten an interview with Pro Hero and UA teacher Present Mic, who was at the scene."*

The camera changed to the reporter and Present Mic, who looked rather put together for someone who had likely gotten zero sleep last night. Considering he was best friends with Aizawa, maybe he was used to acting during odd hours with little rest. Hawks was still adjusting to Aizawa's weird schedule.

"*—The identity of Hawks's attacker is unknown, but we'll do everything in our power to find him."* Present Mic was saying as they tuned in. His smile may look cheerful if Hawks did not know better. He knew better, and could spot the razor-sharp edge to it. *"All Might is particularly invested in bringing this villain down."*

Maki tried to hide her surprise, but she did not have the greatest poker face.*"**All Might** himself has become involved?"*

"*Oh no. Here come the 'Hawks is secretly All Might's secret love child' theories."* Yellow joked weakly.

"*Are we sure he is not?"* White asked with his usual solemnity.

There was a pause.

"That was a joke, by the way."

"*We sure hoped it was, buddy."* Yellow chuckled but Hawks could tell it was forced.

Hawks could not find it in himself to laugh.

"*Of course. He has already been investigating Hawks's disappearance last year. We nearly lost our beloved Number Three before."* Mic smiled right at the camera. *"We're not losing him*

again."

Please tell me they're not, Hawks thought, horrified.

"*Not what?"* Purple asked coolly.

*Please tell me they're not being **this** obvious about wanting to 'protect' me.*

Apparently at least Present Mic *was* because as the DJ Hero calmly answered Maki's questions with an alarming amount of transparency, Hawks could point out every single subtle jab at the Commission. Although the public would remain ignorant to who Present Mic was pleasantly condoning, he may as well be holding up a sign saying 'We know what you did and we aren't letting you get away with it.'

Hawks pressed a hand over his mouth to keep himself from screaming— or laughing hysterically— as Mic and the news continued to tell the public about something the Commission would never have let come to light if they had any say. Amplifier's attack was meant to be a message for Hawks alone, not a publicity stunt. It seemed UA was craftier than he thought. Everyone would be watching Hawks carefully for signs of trouble, at least for a while, with thousands of people ready to blow up and cause a ruckus if he disappeared again like the Commission wanted. Not that it would change anything in the long run.

*What do they think they're **doing?** What will this accomplish? The Commission will just vanish me, let people freak, and have someone 'unconnected' to them take the fall before he—it will most likely be a 'he'—conveniently commits suicide before he can be taken in for questioning.*

"That is disturbingly specific." Pink noted queasily.

Please don't insult both our intelligences by pretending to be shocked. I know how they do things. I just don't know if I'll end up reconditioned or dead in a ditch when I appear again.

"*The device used to restrain Hawks was unlike anything used in the current era."* Maki noted.

"*Indeed. Tech that helps limit or suppress the usage of Quirks is common in our field, but the one used on Hawks was an outdated model that was banned and made illegal due to being inhumane."* Present Mic pulled up a three-dimensional image of the device he just so *happened* to have on hand. *"As you can see, these spikes would clamp **into** the wings. It'd be like having metal shards inside handcuffs. Unnecessary, cruel, and painful. Can cause lasting damage too if they're removed improperly."*

The reporter was clearly at a loss for words, not expecting that. She pulled herself together. *"Where could he have gotten this device?"*

"*The black market. These models were supposed to be destroyed."* Present Mic said bluntly. *"So we've opened an investigation to see why they're not."*

"*Could anti-mutant bigotry have played a part in the attack?"*

"*It's a possibility, but unlikely. This attack was far too personal. Hawks did as well as he could but… if Eraserhead and I had not arrived when we did..."* Present Mic dragged a hand tiredly through his hair.

He's leading them on, Hawks realized.

"*What?"* Green demanded.

He's manipulating them by answering things in a way to make them ask the questions he wants, Hawks clarified. *I see the signs. He's leading into something.*

"*Why did it take so long for Heroes to respond to the disturbance on the Hero Network?"* Maki asked.

"*No report to the Hero Network was made.*" Mic shared. *"We only happened to be going to visit Hawks. Eraserhead is a natural night-owl and Hawks is always busy during the day so visiting then seemed like our best chance to catch him at home."*

"*Why were you visiting him?"* the reporter asked instantly.

"We actually went to his apartment to give him the good news." His weary disposition fell away and he beamed. *"His application to become an assistant teacher at UA has been accepted!"* Present Mic balked, as if he'd accidentally shared something he shouldn't, but Hawks knew his 'mistake' was fake. *"Er, I wasn't supposed to share that yet!"* Mic's smile widened and he waved 'sheepishly' at the camera. *"Congratulations, Hawks! Welcome to the team!"*

XXXXXXX

"*—police have told MNN News that the perpetrator ambushed Hawks with a banned Quirk-suppressing device after he came home at approximately ten o'clock last night. Based on reports from the incident, the perpetrator used a pain-enhancing Quirk to torture Hawks for several hours before Pro Heroes Present Mic and Eraserhead arrived at the scene. Investigators theorize the perpetrator is a stalker, though they also claim he may be a member of the League of Villains seeking revenge for the capture of their leader—"*

"It wasn't us." Twice breathed.

"Of course they blame us." Twice huffed.

"*Why hasn't anyone taken this League out already? [Bleep] Stain and his [bleep] philosophy! They're nothing more than murderous cowards!"*

"It wasn't us." Twice hissed again.

"I know we're Villains but that hurts." Twice sulked.

He continued to watch the coverage as UA was brought into the media circus surrounding the attack on Hawks. Twice was not blind. He saw Present Mic manipulate the masses with that celebrity charm of his. If only they knew what was really going on behind that cheerful smile.

Twice fished a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it, exhaling smoke. He looked up at the cracked ceiling of the rundown apartment he was staying in and watched the vapor dissipate against the plaster.

"They know full well who hurt Hawks. They know, but they're not saying. So they're covering for someone, huh?" Twice mused to himself.

Heroes did not cover up crimes unless one of their own was the one who committed it. It would not do to have the public know a Hero was caught doing a Villainous act, after all. The line between those that were accepted by society and those that weren't could not be blurred and any crime committed— regardless of guilt— meant instant stigmatization. Twice knew that from experience.

So what happened? Who hurt Hawks, and which important, influential Hero was it that the other Heroes were covering it up? What had Hawks done for the other Hero to attack him, because Twice was not optimistic enough to believe the Heroes saw him as blameless. If a Hero attacked someone, there had to be a reason, right? They were always 'guilty', *right*?

Twice was a Villain— a man who removed himself from social acceptability for his own happiness— and he was... *mostly, maybe, had to be* proud of it.

But he was not heartless, or stupid.

So Twice's first thought was that they'd found out Hawks was the type of person who would never be accepted by their society. One with a mental illness that left him blank-eyed and staring in an alleyway after he genuinely thanked a strange man for stopping him from 'splitting'. One who would be rejected or shoved into a mental institution by his own side if they caught wind of the 'people in his head'.

It was a jumped-to conclusion. It all was. Twice tried to rationalize that but a part of him insisted that the signs were popping up and soon he'd see a news report about Hawks being hospitalized in a psych ward for a 'mental breakdown'. Indefinitely.

*Why do I care? He— **has to be** — is still a Hero and an enemy. He stopped us from freeing Shigaraki.*

*He saved us too. Us, a **Villain**. Just because he pretends to be normal doesn't mean he is. He's so trapped by his Heroic life. Admit it, you still want him by our side.*

We can't leave. And he'll never join us. He'll die for them.

*Maybe they want him to. No, they **do** want him to.*

We don't know that. And it's not like the bossman wants Hawks for good reasons.

*Are you sure we don't know? Because it looks like Heroes are covering for Heroes. **Again**. But if they're covering for Heroes to protect Hawks's attacker, then I don't think he's any safer with them over us anymore. And considering bossman, that's saying something.*

Twice flinched. *That's a reach.*

***Is** it? I don't think so. You don't either. Wonder when he'll be hospitalized. Or found dead. Would be less of a media circus if he's dead. Better a dead Hero than a mentally unsound one, **right**?*

A chill went up Twice's spine. *No, that's **not** going to happen.*

*Then why isn't anyone helping him? Why **would** anyone help someone like him? Someone like **us**?*

Twice's breathing grew rapid and he clutched at his head. He was *splitting*. He reached into his pocket but only felt the rough fabric of jeans.

Where was his mask?!

Twice lurched from his chair and fell to the ground as his cigarette extinguished and rolled along the floor. He stumbled to his bag by the bed and tore through it, frantically searching for his mask. His phone and pain meds and a box of cigarettes and some clothes fell to the floor and he shoved them aside frantically, searching for his mask. In his panic, he was unable to comprehend that he could cover himself with other fabric until he found it.

He was splitting.

He was ***SPLITTING***—

XXXXXXX

"What did you *do*?"

The look Hawks gave Aizawa when he arrived in his hospital room was filled with such vitriol he had to wonder if Orange was rubbing off on him.

Aizawa coughed into his hand. "I have done nothing, Hawks."

"And the sky is green." Hawks snarled sarcastically. "*Why* did you get me a position as a teaching assistant at UA?"

Aizawa put his hands in his pockets and slouched. "Many future events involve my students, particularly at the training camp. It was only logical to give you a reason to be here."

"Oh *yes*." Hawks said testily. "I'm certain that was your *only* reason. Don't pretend. You did this to 'protect' me."

"That's another benefit." Aizawa admitted. "If it's any… *consolation*, Mic and I did go to your apartment to tell you about your new job offer. Recent events simply made the acceptance process go by even faster."

Hawks opened his mouth to tell Aizawa exactly what he thought about that and glanced around self-consciously even though he knew Tensei and Fatgum would not be able to hear

him from outside the door. Still, he lowered his voice. "You *do* realize they'll be in danger because of me?"

"The Commission has no power at UA."

"That you know about."

Aizawa frowned at the dig against his coworkers. Hawks would apologize but UA already had a Villain-traitor in their school. Why not a Commission agent too?

"Protecting me is more trouble than it's worth." he continued flatly. "You should be focusing on preventing the future."

"Did you ever consider *this* is part of preventing it?" Aizawa asked with an infuriating amount of gentleness, like *Hawks* was the one who didn't understand the situation.

"The Commission didn't kill other me or bring down Hero Society." Hawks said tonelessly.

"But they sent you on that mission while knowing you'd likely be killed. And you've implied dark secrets behind closed doors played a big part in Hero Society's collapse." Aizawa raised an eyebrow. "Would you and your friends like to tell me about that?"

Hawks— and White— chose not to respond to that query. "Look, I'm grateful for what you're trying to do but I can't accept this position."

"What will you do then?" Aizawa challenged. "Disappear? Hide? Sneak around and struggle while you're hunted down?"

"If it keeps your students from being targeted by the Commission, *yes*." Hawks snapped.

"Based on your request for 'family' to visit your interns, they may already be targets because of their association with you." Aizawa said coolly.

Hawks flinched. Logically he knew it was not an accusation. Illogically, it still stung because *he knew that already, okay?*

Aizawa sighed, but did not apologize. "Look at it this way: your other options will not save the future. The Commission will only hinder your attempts. Plus, at the school I may be able to assist you in controlling the… *combination* of your Quirks. Thus, it is only logical for you to be present at UA, and Toshinori and I have pulled a lot of strings to get you accepted so quickly."

Indignation quickly transformed into guilt.

"I did not intend to sound ungrateful." Hawks said as *not*-tonelessly as he could manage. His response still sounded a bit stiff and robotic, but hopefully Aizawa would chalk it up to anger. He bowed his head in submission as much as he could in the bed. "I humbly accept your offer of employment."

"Excellent." Aizawa pushed a stack of papers his way. "I need you to look through these forms. Your employment technically does not start until the beginning of this next semester but you may be going with me to the training camp."

Hawks felt the voices stir uneasily. "*That* training camp?"

"Yes."

Red jolted. *"We're forgetting to tell him something."* she said suddenly.

What is it? Hawks asked.

"*If I remembered I would tell you to pass it on. Anyone?"*

The other voices shrugged helplessly.

Hawks tuned back in to his external conversation and eyed his bandaged wings critically. "I should be mostly healed by then, in case there are any problems. With Shigaraki in jail, I honestly can't say what will happen next. I'll do everything I can to be there."

"*With our luck we'll probably be out of commission."* Yellow sighed.

"*Yellow, that is inappropriate at this time."* Silver scolded.

"*Huh? Oh **crap**. That was accidental, I swear!"*

Hawks began skimming through the paperwork and had to repress a frown. Some of these dates were rather early. In fact, a few were from a couple days after Tsukauchi and Best Jeanist had released him from the Commission. Hawks eyed Aizawa suspiciously but the UA teacher kept his face perfectly blank. It was doubtful he would insist on starting the employment process so soon, especially since this was from before Hawks had told him the truth.

Which meant All Might— via Toshinori, most likely— had been the one getting the ball rolling.

Hawks was not sure how he felt about the Symbol of Peace's involvement so he ignored it and kept skimming. He eventually noticed a name he did not recognize was scattered throughout the document and pointed it out.

"Hey, Aizawa? Who's this 'Keigo Takami' person?"

Aizawa hesitated, and busily adjusted his scarf. "You. That's your name."

Hawks nodded absently. "Oh, okay."

He continued to read, carefully checking for pretty wording that would reveal the rules of his new gilded cage.

It took him another minute to register what Aizawa had said.

Hawks stared at the kanji written on the page, then back at Aizawa. "…Huh?"

"You heard me." Aizawa grunted, but Hawks could see him watching for his reaction.

Hawks forced himself to swallow as he scrutinized the page and traced the name with a finger. *Keigo Takami.* That was his birth name. It was the name given to him by his neglectful parents and taken from him by the Commission. It proved he had been a person once, more than the Hero everyone cared about but few really knew.

This was his name.

The name he had forgotten.

His name…

The name didn't feel right, like an ill-fitting glove with splinters in the fingertips. Hearing it felt *wrong*. And painful, like it was the name of a recently deceased loved one rather than what his used to be.

Maybe Keigo Takami *was* dead. He was the innocent, wide-eyed, six year-old child who hadn't been allowed to exist once the Commission tore away everything they did not want him to be.

"How did you find this?" Hawks heard himself ask. His voice sounded detached, as if he were commenting on the weather out of sheer boredom rather than discussing the name he had forgotten.

Aizawa did not fail to notice. His brow furrowed. "Keigo—"

"*Don't call me that!*" Hawks snapped. He blanched and recoiled in preparation for a blow that never came. Hawks forced himself not to wait for it and took a calming breath. "I— Sorry. That's *not* me."

Hawks's voice did not shake. It did *not*.

It just went a little uneven for a second. That was all.

Aizawa's expression was neutral, but Hawks could see the sorrowful tilt in his lips and eyes. "I apologize, Hawks."

Rather than unjustifiably explode and scream at him for a stupid reason, Hawks turned the paperwork over so he did not have to look at it anymore. "Not to switch topics—" *Real subtle, **Hawks**.* "—but how's Eri doing?"

"She's adjusting." Aizawa said simply. "Shinso, Todoroki, Iida, and Tokoyami have been visiting, and I plan to introduce her to a student that may be able to assist her in figuring out how to control her Quirk after the summer camp."

Hawks perked up. "That's great." He shifted and glanced self-consciously at his bandaged wings. "Once I'm healed up, can I visit her again?"

Aizawa's eyebrows crept upward. "I do hope so considering you'll be living on the UA campus as well."

Hawks had not considered that. He thought back to Miruko's apartment and repressed a shiver. "Is Miruko going to have to move?"

"Most likely."

Miruko had been at that apartment since she first became a Hero. And now she had to leave it after eight years because it wasn't safe. Because of *him*.

Hawks squashed his guilt. "…I see. How much will my rent be?"

"What." Aizawa said flatly.

"My rent? At UA?" Hawks ventured. "How much of my pay will be taken for boarding?" He winced and hastily turned over the paperwork again, skimming it as he tried to ignore any mention of 'Keigo' he saw. "It's in here, isn't it? I apologize for the stupid question."

"Staff and students don't have to pay to live in the dorms." Aizawa said coolly. "And we certainly don't 'take your pay'. It's *yours*."

Hawks wisely kept his mouth shut. He found what his 'assistant teacher' salary would be and began accounting for his payments to the Commission— because dead Hero walking or not, they would demand he pay his debts— while trying to guess how much would be taken by UA for their generosity.

"*Aizawa isn't lying."* Pink said. *"They're not going to steal from you."*

Right. And it's not 'stealing' if they're owed.

"…*They really aren't."* Pink sighed.

Okay.

"*You don't believe me."* Now Pink sounded sad. *"I understand."*

Hawks ignored her and her misplaced compassion. He spent the rest of Aizawa's visit prodding him for information on how Eri was doing and getting details about his former interns' antics. It appeared Tokoyami had not brought up his revelation with anyone— even Aizawa— and Hawks could not decide whether he was relieved or not.

As soon as Aizawa left, Hawks slumped against his pillows and stared at the ceiling, heart in his throat.

Green cleared his throat. *"So… are we going to talk about your name—?"*

No .

"*Understood, Gold."*

Hawks did not relax at the much-preferred nickname. *Be honest with me: what will UA want in return for helping me?*

"*Nothing."* Green insisted. *"They're not the Commission. They won't enslave you for life."*

But I am indebted to them.

"*You are not."*

I am. People always want things from me. Aizawa knows about you so your knowledge is what he wants, but what about the others? All Might, Nedzu, Present Mic… What do they want?

"*They want to help you, idiot."* Orange huffed.

"*Like Heroes are supposed to.*" Pink added.

"*Free of debt or expectations."* Yellow said brightly.

I wish I could believe that, Hawks admitted. He began counting tiles on the ceiling. *They can't be as bad as the Commission. And Aizawa's been pretty cool so far… Except for the initial misunderstanding incident.*

"*I would be insulted on their behalf that you would even think to put them in the same category as the Commission but I understand your reservations considering your background."* Silver said bluntly.

Thanks, Hawks thought with only *slight* sarcasm because sue him for being paranoid. He took a deep, deep breath. *You know how I said you'll be able to tell when I'm not-dealing with things? I think you might be able to tell soon. If…* He swallowed. *If I drift, one of you have to take over. We need to stay alert.*

The voices did not seem to grasp the full weight of that request. Hell, Hawks himself did not understand why giving them control when he was unaware caused his throat to close up with fear. None of the voices chided him for that weakness, for which he was mostly grateful. 'Mostly' because Hawks could not deny the desire to have someone finally yell at him for what he had done.

I disobeyed the Commission.

The voices politely ignored his anxiety as he curled up on the bed and tried to force himself to breathe.

"*We'll watch out for you."* Green promised.

The others did not need to echo the sentiment.

Hawks closed his eyes, hoping to maybe get some shut eye before he was inevitably woken by nightmares.

"*Oh dear."* Red said abruptly.*"I do believe we forgot to tell Aizawa we are Ennea. The first Ennea, not the one from last night."*

The voices looked at each other.

Hawks pursed his lips so he would not laugh hysterically.

Yellow did it for him, giggling nervously. *"Oops."*

XXXXXXX

The sound of police sirens was not something the agent known as 'Amplifier' was used to fleeing from, but now he found himself casually turning into an alleyway and letting them pass by. He was out of his uniform and in civilian clothes, thus minimizing the risk of him being identified, but the Commission taught him to be overly cautious.

It was not supposed to be like this. When he saw the news covering his 'attack' on Hawks, he knew he had messed up. His mission had been to knock Hawks unconscious, leave some blood and a warning for Miruko to keep her mouth shut, and bring his brainwashed pupil to the Commission labs to be 'cured'.

Amplifier had been in the Commission long enough to know what that 'cure' would actually entail.

Call it pride, but he did not want Hawks to break like that. The kid always did so well under pressure, but remedial courses would shatter his mind into pieces before letting it be remolded into whatever the President desired. Amplifier didn't want the project he worked on to be turned into another smiling shell, so he tried to give Hawks mercy.

The kid being who he was, he'd rejected it so admirably. Amplifier would be impressed if it'd been a Villain trying to get information. Instead, Hawks had foolishly fought him even though he was on the kid's side.

And now Amplifier would pay for it.

He knew how this worked. He had failed at his mission. If no one outside the Commission knew, the President might let it slide, but the news had found out thanks to the two UA teachers. Did those Heroes know *nothing* about what should and should not be made public knowledge? To Amplifier, Hawks's resistance had been admirable, but to the public he would only be seen as vulnerable, unheroic, and *weak*. Civilians were arrogant like that, acting like they would fare better as they looked at torture from behind the safety of their glass screens when in reality they would become blubbering wrecks in the first second.

Amplifier pulled his hood over his head and walked deeper into the alley. He needed to return to HQ but knew he could not simply walk through the front door. The news may be hounding the Commission since it was known Hawks had some type of connection to the organization, and he could not afford to be spotted. Another man emerged from the other end of the alley but Amplifier barely spared him a glance. He was just a man walking, after all, and if someone tried to mug him they would be in for a nasty surprise.

"Amplifier."

Amplifier jerked to a halt and turned, but lowered his hand without touching the other man.

Although he was half-hidden in the shadows, he recognized the man as a fellow agent, Norito Kaetsu, if only because of what an interesting case he was. Sniper and martial artist, one of many handlers of Hawks, exposed for sexual harassment and thrown into Tartarus so he would not share the Commission's secrets, only to be released recently.

Amplifier had not followed his case as closely as he could have, but had looked into Kaetsu from time to time out of… *necessity*, since Hawks was his student as well. Hawks's name and Kaetsu's worst crimes were left out of the court case, but Amplifier was not stupid, just like the other handlers and agents were not.

He knew what Kaetsu had done— he had witnessed it himself— but since the Commission had ordered it, there was no reason to do anything.

Still, Amplifier remembered hating the idea of Kaetsu tormenting Hawks. It was simply unnecessary, since it was not his job to teach Hawks how to endure that kind of cruelty. Hell, even the Commission President agreed Kaetsu had gone overboard by the end. The man had been so close to breaking Hawks completely that the higher ups had feared nothing could be salvaged from their Icarus Project when they finally said enough and put a stop to it.

Though Amplifier supposed the whole thing had proven Hawks's Heroic strength of mind and that was what mattered in the end. The Icarus Project had learned his lesson and was still functional. That being said, Amplifier would *not* say he was pleased when Kaetsu was arrested, but he was certainly not annoyed like Pathfinder, who muttered about finding the whistleblower and killing them.

Amplifier, meanwhile, had kept tabs on Kaetsu, just in case he decided to be a problem. The Commission was surprisingly kind to him despite throwing him in Tartarus, likely since he had been so loyal and useful. Kaetsu had been given updates about Hawks during his years in prison and— according to the reports— his contacts even let him believe his delusion that Hawks was secretly female.

Though if Amplifier were being honest with himself, 'let' was less accurate than '*conditioned*'. He'd previously thought they were trying to make Kaetsu's word seem less believable— after all, if he believed Hawks was a girl, he must not be right in the head— but now he was not so sure.

And then Kaetsu unexpectedly had been released four years after his incarceration and was brought back into the Commission's workforce without a fuss. Amplifier would not openly question the President's decision, but inwardly he had to wonder what secret game she was playing.

Amplifier said none of this to his fellow agent. "I was not aware we were meeting, Kaetsu. Are you here to take me to HQ?"

Kaetsu stepped out of the shadows and stared at him with his acid green eyes, his jaw clenched tight as a vein twitched madly in his jugular. "I saw you."

Never before had Amplifier heard three words be spoken with such *hatred*.

Amplifier could not mistake the utter fury in his tone for anything else.

He had a decision to make— run, or get close enough to use his Quirk. He knew the Commission saw him as valuable and thus had not sent Kaetsu to kill him— if they had, Amplifier would not have seen him before he was shot in the head by the sniper— so he stepped closer rather than retreat. Kaetsu was now in reaching distance.

"Saw what, my friend?" Amplifier asked in a soothing, pleasant tone cultivated to encourage relaxation and trust.

"I *saw you*." Kaetsu repeated, voice shaking as if he could barely contain his rage. "I saw you try to break her. But she's mine to break. Hawks is *mine*."

He laughed as if his mirth had physically torn itself from his throat and his lips twisted like he was in physical pain. Before Amplifier could hope, they then morphed into a wide, unhinged grin, his laughter coming in sharp, agonizing bursts that made his shoulders lurch. It was then Amplifier realized just how much he had underestimated Kaetsu's— Commission assisted— deteriorated mental state.

He lunged for the other agent but Kaetsu dodged, grabbing him and throwing him into the wall head first. Amplifier struck the stone and only had a second to realize a cuff had been locked around his wrist. Electricity tore through him and his back arched, his body writhing and jerking as his breath failed to reach his chest.

Kaetsu watched him with deceptive serenity, the maniacal smile gone from his face, and casually put his hands in his pockets, shoulders slouching. He took a deep breath, inhaling through his nose, and closed his eyes as if he were in ecstasy.

"Mmm. A fear of failing and growing old with no legacy to speak of, huh?" His lip curled. "That's *boring*. Just like that serial killer's fear of weakness was *boring*. Why are you all so *boring?* Why can't you be like my Angel? She's so wonderfully *obedient*." His expression crumpled. "I miss her so *much*. Why won't they let me see her again? I promise I won't kill her. I killed those other mutants so I won't kill my Angel. I can control myself, see? You see? Why do they continue to keep us apart when we *belong together*?"

Kaetsu paced back and forth, dragging his hands frantically through his ghostly white hair like a drug addict who'd missed his latest fix. The electricity tearing through Amplifier's body faded, leaving hims shuddering and twitching on the ground. Kaetsu glanced at him out of the corner of one acid-green eye and his expression shifted from annoyance to boredom so quickly Amplifier wondered if he'd imagined it.

"I suppose I *could* use your fear to rapidly age you to death but..." He halted in place and twirled back to Amplifier, clapping his hands together once in delight. "I think one of *her* fears is much more satisfying to watch in action, as… *interesting* as it is." He put a

finger to his lips and made a shushing noise. "Hush, hush, little Commission dog. Scream in silence now."

A gigantic figure rose behind the— rogue?— agent.

In the shadows, all Amplifier could see a misshapen head and strange, elongated earlobes that ended in what looked like audio jacks.

Kaetsu smiled pleasantly. "Kill him."

The Nomu lunged.

Amplifier did not have time to scream.

Silence is Golden

Ingenium and Fatgum escorted Hawks out of the hospital the next day. Miruko was still noticeably absent, and Hawks knew her well enough that it was difficult not to jump to any bad conclusions. He would have heard if Commission HQ 'mysteriously' burned down so at least she wasn't reacting too badly. Either that or she didn't know yet.

The moment the three Heroes stepped outside, reporters swarmed them like sharks smelling blood. Unfortunately, no one had given Hawks cosmetics to cover up with so all his bruises— and his bandaged wings— were on clear display. That was mortifying enough but they were not the only thing he wished he could hide.

Hawks uncomfortably adjusted his coat and resisted the urge to zip it up to cover the diamond pattern on his top. Showing the Commission's mark on his costume felt like adding gasoline to the fire now, like he was mocking them by flaunting the emblem that showed he was their Hero after having disobeyed them so openly. That was what they would think he was doing, anyway, rather than seeing the calculated move to get more pictures of Hawks's injuries out into the world.

Ingenium had mentioned getting all the evidence they could out there without outright saying what the Commission had done, citing how attempts to take down the pictures would only make people circulate them more. Hawks hated it but he had reluctantly agreed. The public loved their mysteries so here he was, walking into a throng of reporters will his wounds on display for everyone to pick apart and scrutinize.

Despite Orange's adamant belief the injuries were marks of pride because *he fought dammit,* Hawks struggled not to duck in his collar as much as he could as cameras flashed. He knew pictures— and the theories that would come from them— would be up on the internet within the half-hour. The questions the reporters shouted at him melded into a maddening cacophony of noise as soothing as nails on a chalkboard but he could hear each individual one.

"Hawks! Do you know who attacked you and why?"

"Was it the League of Villains?"

"Is it true a past stalker of yours was released from prison on good behavior?"

"How did the Villain get into your home?"

"What made you decide to apply for a teaching position at UA?"

"Do you suspect your attacker is linked to anti-mutant bigotry?"

"Why has the Hero Commission refused to comment on your injuries?"

"When did you decide to pursue a teaching job?"

"Is it true your wings have been permanently damaged?"

"Do you know who ambushed you?"

Before Hawks could answer anything, Fatgum put his hand on his shoulder with the slightest amount of pressure to push him along. Hawks got the message to remain quiet though he didn't see the harm in answering some of the questions. He had the feeling they had only taken him out of the hospital so publicly so the news could see him and confirm to the populace that he was not dead.

Hawks let Fatgum and Ingenium guide him through the throng and hid his trepidation when he spotted their destination, a black car with tinted windows.

Ingenium leaned over to whisper in his ear. "It's Mic."

Hawks relaxed and went into the back seat, maneuvering with care so he would not jostle his wings. Fatgum sat beside him while Ingenium took shotgun.

Present Mic grinned at him in the rear-view mirror. "Hey, Hawks. How are you doing this fine day?"

"I just want to get to my Agency." Hawks said vaguely. The realization that he might have made an assumption about where he was being taken hit him and he felt the feathers on his wings fluff up. "You *are* taking me there, right?"

"We are." Mic confirmed as he began to drive.

"See? They're not the Commission." Yellow crowed.

I know that.

"And yet you worried you were being kidnapped or dragged to UA for some glorified house arrest." Orange accused.

Hawks ignored him. He glanced nervously outside the closed car window every few minutes, though Purple reassured him that Fatgum acted as a good sniper deterrent.

"I can't believe this." Green said abruptly, his voice unsteady.

Grief unexpectedly stabbed Hawks and he jumped. He gave Fatgum a shaky smile to say he was fine and turned his attention inward. *Green?*

"I'm fine." Green lied, sounding close to tears. *"It just hit me, you know? We came back to save Hero Society but its backbone will **assassinate** their own Heroes."*

Hawks got a glimpse of his spiraling thought process and recoiled. *Hero Society is still worth saving*, he thought fiercely. *It just needs to change. Your mission **isn't** to force it to stay like this.*

Green took a shuddering breath. *"You're right. Okay."* His misery drained away. ***"Okay**. Sorry for the cynical outlook."*

"You almost sounded like Purple." Yellow joked.

Everyone chuckled except Red.

They arrived at Hawks's Agency and he got inside without being shot. He'd like to pretend to be confused why it seemed all of his sidekicks were in the building today but denial hadn't exactly helped him much before.

Mockingjay waited for him by the secretary's desk. As soon as he was in range, she grasped his wrist. "Your pulse is fast."

"Being fast is my thing." Hawks joked weakly.

Mockingjay ignored him and nodded to Present Mic, Fatgum, and Ingenium. "I'll keep him here."

Hawks frowned. "I—"

"You're injured. *And* staying here today. Good for you."

Of course she said that. What *good* news it was, that Hawks's injuries gave him the perfect excuse to remain in his Agency building, where his sidekicks could keep an eye on him while he worked.

And of course that same news meant Hawks' injuries gave Mockingjay the perfect excuse to *make* him remain in his Agency building where his sidekicks could keep an eye on him while he worked.

Hawks scowled petulantly and ignored how his skin had gone clammy.

"You can work on that serial killer investigation here." Mockingjay continued.

The look she gave him said she knew how he really felt about being forced to stay at his Agency while leaving who knew how many crimes not dealt with and people not saved because he was being lazy—

"Breathe." Silver said sternly. *"You cannot expect yourself to shoulder the world's problems alone."*

"*No one else does either."* Green added.

"Except the Commission." Red mused. *"But they are, as Orange so eloquently says, 'shit'."*

Hearing her curse made Hawks have to stifle a badly-timed giggle. Her attempt to calm him down worked and he *breathed*.

"Okay. Investigation it is." He turned to Tensei. "Did you get our request? Can you help out?"

Ingenium reluctantly shook his head. "We've had an influx of robberies so I had to decline."

"Fair enough." Hawks said agreeably. He bade Ingenium and Fatgum goodbye— reluctantly acknowledging he'd be seeing them again soon— and looked to Mockingjay as they entered the office elevator. "So, our investigation?"

"We'll have some help."

That *should* be a good thing.

Mockingjay's face said it wasn't. She had that carefully neutral expression she wore when she did not want to give in to her anger and throw something. Mockingjay was pessimistic but she did not look ready to blow up for no reason.

Hawks braced himself. "Who are we teaming up with?"

She scowled. "Endeavor."

White retreated.

Orange cursed.

Pink winced.

Yellow groaned.

Hawks kept on smiling until his cheeks hurt.

"Endeavor." he echoed tonelessly. "Of course it is."

Even before he angered them enough for them to send Amplifier after him, the Commission seemed determined to make his life more difficult than it needed to be.

Thankfully Hawks did not need to meet his former idol face to face today. Endeavor seemed content to look through evidence on his own, in his own Agency, and Hawks was not exactly inclined to rush over to join him.

Logically he knew Endeavor was one of the best investigators of the Pro Heroes.

Emotionally, he did not want to deal with the man now that he knew what happened in private.

The news— which he had playing in the background— did not help his mood. On the plus side, they had finally stopped speculating what happened to him. On the not-so plus side, they had moved on to the League of Villains, which Hawks would not mind if not for Dabi's face— *Touya Todoroki's* burned and scarred face— flashing across the screen every time he changed the channel.

With the exception of Dabi and Kurogiri, the members of the League of Villains who had attacked Shigaraki's escort had all been identified, which naturally led to speculation. Hawks

watched Dabi's profile flash across the screen as the news romanticized the mysterious nature of this new Villain and turned it off. He texted Miruko demanding an answer from her before he started a nation-wide search and sat back, taking a moment to *breathe*.

He *tried*, anyway because every second he sat and did nothing felt like an eternity.

Hawks gave up, pulled a folder to him, and opened it, staring at the page. No matter how long he looked, the words refused to mean anything. He closed it and dragged his hands down his face.

Come on. You need to focus. You can't go out so you have to be useful from here.

Hawks glanced around his empty, quiet office and his stomach twisted into knots. He looked at the door and wondered what would happen if he tried to leave. Would Mockingjay stop him or would he find out he was locked in?

Stop it. Mockingjay isn't the Commission. Besides, this is temporary. You won't be stuck inside forever. You're ***not*** *caged.*

"That's right." Green said and Hawks jumped. *"It sucks that you can't fly freely right now but you're not a prisoner or anything."*

"Worry not. You will be able to move around a lot more at UA." Silver added. *"The campus is quite large."*

"There is a spot on top of Heights Alliance that is perfect for watching the sunrise." White murmured, almost to himself. *"The sunlight reflects off the buildings and makes them look like they are the same colors as the dawn. It is very peaceful."*

Hawks could almost picture it. His frantic heartbeat slowed. *Thanks.*

He shifted and pressed his lips together to hold in a pained grunt as he jostled his wings.

"Do you want one of us to take over?" Pink asked instantly.

Are you seriously asking if I want you to feel this instead of me?

"Yes." She said, unrepentant.

"Since we're supposed to rest we may as well test what Green did." Purple added.

"I'll take control so we're not unresponsive." Green offered.

Hawks shook his head at their obviousness. *You all continue to be terrible at hiding your true motives.*

"Let us help take some of the pain off of you." White requested.

A surge of guilt and the desperate desire to do something, *anything* to help jabbed at Hawks and he relented. *Are you sure you want to feel this?*

"So you can get a break? Yes." Green stated.

Hawks reached inward and felt a pull in his skull. He blinked and he was in the UA dorms with all the voices around him except Green. Pink immediately hugged him. Yellow joined in right after. Hawks wiggled briefly in protest but gave in. Being held with no expectations felt… nice.

"Green?" Red called towards the ceiling.

"I'm good," came the reply. He sounded slightly breathless but seemed fine.

Hawks was guided to the couch and made to sit.

"This is still so weird." Yellow noted as he sat beside him.

Hawks had to agree as Red conjured a blanket out of thin air. Silver took it and laid it over him.

I'm okay, Hawks insisted.

"You were tortured." Orange said flatly. "Again."

It was worth it to protect you, Hawks reminded them.

Silver brushed his hair back and Hawks belatedly noticed his bruises were on his… 'mental form' or whatever. He touched his wing— both of which were slightly tattered from the device used on them— and his fingers quivered.

Pink grasped his hand and held it while Yellow leaned against his shoulder. Orange's vague form climbed over the back of the couch and settled behind Hawks, covering his back, while White simply sat where Orange had previously gone over.

Hawks stayed still so he would not dislodge any of them. *What's with the lack of personal space?*

"It's called being silently supportive." Pink said.

"Emphasis on *silent*." Orange muttered.

Yellow leaned over to whisper conspiratorially in Hawks's ear. "It seems Orange is still afraid of emotional conver— Ow!"

Orange drew his hand back with a huff but did not move away. Hawks was tempted to trap him in a hug to see him curse, but decided to give him a reprieve. He could tease him later. As the voices huddled around him, comforting him with their presence, Hawks felt himself relax. It may be because of their influence, but the 'UA dorms' felt so *safe*, like nothing bad could reach him here. It was almost easy to forget it was all a fabrication, created by the minds of the eight other souls stuck in his head and body.

A thought struck Hawks and his stomach dropped. *If I died would you die with me or would you go to your own bodies?*

Purple grimaced. "We'd probably die with you."

"We are *not* finding that out." Red said simultaneously.

"Can we not have another existential crisis *please*?" Yellow begged.

Hawks shrugged and hoped he could keep his thoughts to himself. He couldn't help thinking like that. After all, things could not go back to the way they were before he decided to stick it to the Commission. He was not sure he wanted it to.

Green, being the saint he was, began working on paperwork and skimming through reports. Hawks trusted him to fill it out correctly and mostly tuned his body's actions out. It was so much nicer to be able to go in here when someone else was in control instead of floating in near-nothingness, only able to see what his body was doing while being helpless to control it himself.

He must have drifted off— the normal kind of 'drifting off', not the 'losing all senses' kind— because when he grew aware again, he felt close to rested for once.

Also, Green was shouting.

"*Guys!"* Green called. *"We have company."*

Hawks and the others peered outside to see Mockingjay had returned to the office. She handed Green a folder. "Here's the intel on the MLA you requested."

Hawks's eyes widened with alarm. *Green, don't spea—*

"Thanks." Green said, accepting the folder.

Mockingjay lashed out like a striking viper and grasped Hawks's body's arm.

"Who are you?" she growled.

Hawks felt his skin drain of color. *I told you so.*

"*How*?!" Yellow spluttered.

Hawks ignored him and ran for the door. He grasped the handle but it would not budge. He yanked on it frantically but no matter how hard he pulled, it did not move.

Green! Let me out!

*"I'm **trying**. I'm kind of panicking here!"* Green yelled back.

Mockingjay's grip tightened. "Who. Are. You?" she repeated.

Hawks sensed Green was about to come up with an excuse.

She'll be able to tell if you lie, he warned.

Green froze. His panic made the windows of the dorms rattle.

"*Answer her*, dumbass!" Orange bellowed at the ceiling.

"I'm Hello. Green." Green squeaked. He realized what he had said and his cheeks flushed. "I — I mean, I'm *Green*. Hello. Hi. I'm a Hero, too. Um… Gold— I mean, Hawks is busy right now?"

Hawks doubled his efforts to get the door open to no avail.

"Hawks is 'busy'." Mockingjay echoed coolly.

"Yes." Green cleared his throat. "I assure you he's okay. He just can't come out right now."

Mockingjay's grey eyes narrowed to slits. "And what does *that* mean?"

"Um." Green said, and it was strange for Hawks to hear his own voice sound so timid. "Well, I'm kinda stuck in Gold— er, Hawks's head." *"After we went back in time."* "So now I'm kind of like a voice? But—" *"But not in a schizophrenic way."* "But we've been getting used to being stuck like this and since he was in pain we switched out" *"But we're still kind of new to this."* "So he's stuck in there while I am in control, you see, and I'm not sure exactly why." *"But I theorize it may be due to our emotional state and—"* I didn't mention we can feel each other's emotions did I? We didn't want to tell anyone because we were scared we'd be captured, tortured, or killed." *"Not that there are more than me in here."* "I mean, I wasn't implying that there are more people in here than me. That is what I meant to say— Oh shoot Gold said you can tell if I lie." *"I should have known better but—"* "To be honest we didn't expect to meet you at all since you'd probably see us as crazy like Aizawa almost did but he turned around I swear—"

Mockingjay watched Green ramble himself into a deeper hole with a stoic and unaffected expression. Hawks yanked on the immovable door knob like his life depended on it. Which it kind of did.

Green, could you ***please*** *be convincing for* ***one second?!***

Green stopped rambling with a wince. *"What do I say instead then?!"*

"So what you're saying…" Mockingjay began coldly, and Hawks felt his heartbeat quicken. "…is you're another person trapped in Hawks's head?"

Green smiled awkwardly. "Yeah."

"Did this happen because of Haw— '*Gold's*' disappearance?"

"That was fast." Yellow whistled.

Green twiddled his fingers like Pink was prone to do when she was anxious. "Yes."

"Do you mean him harm?" Mockingjay asked sharply.

Green shook his head fiercely. "*Never*. We came back to save him so he wouldn't die again."

"…Did Green mention we were from the future in his ramblings?" Red asked slowly.

"I don't know." Purple admitted. "I couldn't keep up."

Orange palmed his face. "Deku, you fucking *moron*."

Green did not appear to hear them.

Mockingjay's face went blank. "Die again." She echoed faintly.

"Yeah. But he's alive now and we *won't* let the L— anyone kill him again." Green faltered and looked earnestly at her. "I swear we didn't mean for this to happen. We didn't mean to appear in Gold's head. We just… wanted to save people. Please don't punish Hawks for our mistake."

It's not your fault, Hawks reminded Green fiercely.

All he got in response was a burst of gentle acknowledgment.

Mockingjay closed her eyes and took a shuddering breath. Then she opened them and inclined her head. "It is nice to meet you, Green. Thank you for helping Hawks."

"She *believes* us?" Pink gasped.

"It seems so." Purple looked to Hawks. "What do you think?"

Hawks took in Mockingjay's responses as best he could from within the dorm. She seemed to be rather calm about the whole thing, as if something she'd expected had turned out to be true. He relaxed.

She won't hurt us.

Green blinked and smiled hesitantly. His thoughts turned to Aizawa and his good intentions and his smile vanished. "You're not going to try to send us to a psych ward to 'fix' us, right?"

"No." Mockingjay said firmly. She reached out and carefully ruffled Hawks's hair. "You don't need to be 'fixed', do you hear me? You are *not* broken. None of you are."

Green beamed at her. "Wow. You're… taking this better than we expected. When we first saw you you seemed kind of cold but you're really kind." He balked. "I'm sorry! I'm not used to keeping thoughts to myself. In here everything just… flows, you know?"

"I understand." Mockingjay said quietly.

"*Does* she though?" Yellow asked suddenly. "Or does she think Hawks has multiple personalities?"

Green paused, thoughts stuttering to a halt.

Apparently pure, unadulterated terror was the missing key to get Hawks back out because he jolted back into his body.

"I'm not schizophrenic." he blurted.

Mockingjay said nothing.

"I'm *not*." Hawks pleaded.

He could see the tremors in her fingers. "What did 'Green' mean by you dying?" she asked evenly.

"*What?"* Green asked, confused.

"*You **didn't tell her** we're from the future!"* Orange bellowed.

Green blanched. *"I did."*

"*I don't think so."* Red said, voice low with horror. *"I think you did what Hawks does and didn't say everything you meant to out loud."*

Hawks barely heard them, too busy drowning in the vague flashes of his future self's death. He swallowed and forced his voice to be steady even though he knew Mockingjay would be able to tell. "I didn't die."

Her expression crumpled before she forced it back into apathy. "You're *lying*."

"I'm not." Hawks repeated hopelessly. "Look, it's not what you think—"

Mockingjay stepped forward and despite telling the others he believed she would never harm them, Hawks flinched back. She caught his arm and pulled him into a hug.

"What happened to you?"

Hawks knew his eyes were too wide, his face too pale, his *everything* too out of control for him to appear reasonable and stable. But reasonable and stable was what he needed because Mockingjay was not someone who would accept half-truths. If he did give half-truths— like saying he technically did not die— she would see it as a lie and press harder.

He had to clarify things and tell her the truth. The *whole* truth…

…which she still might not believe. Mockingjay could see the impossible, but time traveling voices might be beyond even her tolerance level. Still, Hawks had to at least try. It was not worth it to let her think he had literal voices in his head.

He steeled himself. "I—"

A piercing scream tore through the air and made all fear for himself and the voices vanish. Despite the distance, he immediately knew it had come from within his Agency.

He grabbed Mockingjay and flew out the window, ignoring the pain in his wings. He swooped into the bottom floor and set her down, yanking out two feather-swords. Mockingjay stayed at his side with her bow drawn as other Heroes rushed into the lobby, searching for the threat.

The receptionist was pressed against the wall behind her desk, staring at the deceptively simple box that was on top of it. Beside her was Shatterpoint, who clung to her shoulder as he stood between the receptionist and the package.

Hawks was about to order an evacuation from the building but Shatterpoint shook his head, signaling it was not a bomb. Hawks exchanged a look with Mockingjay and she nodded. They carefully passed the hyperventilating receptionist and Mockingjay used her bow to flip open the top of the box.

Inside was a man's severed head.

XXXXXXX

The receptionist was sent home early with Shatterpoint and a few more sidekicks. According to her tremulous report, she had returned from a bathroom break to find the box on her desk. Its intended recipient had been Hawks Agency as stated on the label— not Hawks himself— so she had opened it to find the head inside.

The box had been delivered by a simple delivery girl in a uniform, whom the police were tracking down. Hawks's sidekicks and Tsukauchi were already working on identifying the victim and finding the rest of him. Hawks would join them but Mockingjay had put her foot down and refused to let him fly again. Despite Hawks's annoyance— so what if his wings hurt and bled a little from the short flight down to the ground level?— he understood.

The Commission was likely still lurking.

And they might be angrier than even he predicted.

Could it be a warning from the Commission?

"*If it is, they are even more abhorrent than I thought."* Silver said, sounding slightly nauseous.

"*Do you recognize him?"* Green asked.

Hawks forced himself to look at the photos of the head and felt Red and Yellow retreat. *No.*

"*Then who else would send a random head to your Agency as a 'warning'?"* White demanded.

"***Is** it a warning?"* Purple asked suddenly. *"Or did the sender think they were 'helping'?"*

"*What does **that** mean?"* Pink demanded.

"*It seems oddly coincidental that an unknown man's head was delivered to Hawks's Agency after he was attacked by Amplifier. Aizawa said he didn't catch up to that other Ennea, right?"*

"*That's a leap in logic."* Green protested faintly.

"*Is it?"* Purple asked coolly. *"They seemed pretty angry Gold was hurt."*

Hawks was distracted by Mockingjay, who hurried right to his desk with a folder in hand.

She grimaced. "We found the victim. The… rest of him. He might be another of the serial killer's."

She handed him the folder. Hawks reluctantly opened it and skimmed the document. Masao Himura, age forty-four. Off-white hair, indigo eyes. Worked for an insurance organization and had some type of Quirk that let him give people a light zap if he touched them, no more painful than a static shock. Was a rather reserved man with no family or friends to contact or question. The thing that interested Hawks most was the lack of a mutant type Quirk.

"*A 'static shock' Quirk…?"* Green murmured.

Hawks ignored him as he began to mumble. "If he wasn't a mutant, how do we know it's the same killer?"

"The wounds and cause of death match the other cases. Forensics checked. The only difference is this body was…" She grimaced. "…decapitated postmortem."

"That suggests irrational anger." Hawks mused. "Think it was personal? Or maybe a copycat?"

"Possibly." Mockinjay scowled. "Regardless, that's seven deaths."

The '*It's your fault more people are dead. You aren't working hard enough.*' went unsaid but was implied.

No, that wasn't right. Katniss was not like the Commission President.

"And our serial killer probably knows we're on his trail considering his delivery." she continued.

Hawks shoved away all of his worries about the Commission and focused on the mission at hand. The killer had escaped them for too long already. "Find out where that package came from. Put a majority of the sidekicks on this case. We need to find this guy *yesterday*."

"*It's Amplifier."* Green said suddenly.

Hawks nearly jumped. *What?!*

"*Not the serial killer."* Green elaborated hastily. *"The victim."*

"*I think you're right."* Purple said reluctantly. *"Look at his profile. He just so happens to have no family or friends to talk to, his height, build, and weight are right, his 'static shock' Quirk could be a severely downplayed pain enhancing Quirk, and I'd bet the 'insurance company' he works for is a cover."*

"*His eyes are the same indigo shade."* Red gasped.

Hawks studied the picture more closely and saw she was right.

"Could the other victims be Commission agents as well?" Silver asked.

Hawks held in a bitter scoff. *I doubt that. The Commission would never have **me** investigating if they were.*

Hawks blinked and saw Mockingjay was watching him carefully. "Were you..." she frowned. "...talking with your friends?"

Hawks nodded hesitantly. "Yeah. They think the victim was Amplifier. Could you look into that 'insurance company' and see if it's a cover for the Commission?"

"Consider it done." she said simply.

Hawks felt the knots in his stomach ease. Mockingjay may not believe him, but she would still have his back. He glanced self-consciously around his office and stepped closer, gripping the folder with both his hands.

"About our conversation earlier… would you let me explain?"

She inclined her head in silent acknowledgment.

So Hawks told her.

About the voices and their future, about the Paranormal Liberation Front and his future self's death, about the Nomu and Eri, about how the voices had given him other Quirks and encouraged him to fight the Commission.

He watched every twitch of her face and hands and the knots slowly twisted back together in his gut, squeezing so tightly his fingertips felt cold.

"I can tell by the look on your face that you don't believe me." he stated.

"I know *you* believe what they say, but I'm not sure I believe *them*." Mockingjay said bluntly. "There are plenty of ways to mess with minds in this world, Hawks."

Translation: She thought the voices were either the result of a Quirk or that Hawks's mind had finally fractured on its own.

Hawks was too tired to be frustrated with her conclusions. "What's with everyone thinking I'm being deceived? Do I come across as that naive?"

"Not naive." Mockingjay noted. "But overly willing to lose yourself for the sakes of others and their 'save the world' type missions." She hesitated and put a hand on his shoulder. "You already give up so much of yourself, and they want you to *give up more*."

The voices flinched, their hurt, guilt and anger melding together.

Hawks scowled. "They're not—"

"They might not mean it maliciously." Mockingjay noted. "But they *do* expect you to let them use your body for themselves. To… save the world, yes. But also for their own comfort." She held up a stalling hand. "Do not think I am incapable of empathy. I cannot imagine what it must be like for them in there, without a body to call their own. However— benign as it may be— *they are using you*, Hawks. And for that reason, I cannot trust them."

'*Or their word.'* went unsaid.

Hawks opened his mouth to argue, but could not find the words to say. The voices did not know Mockingjay from their previous timeline, and they had no stories they could share to convince her they were telling the truth. And with Hawks putting himself in the line of fire to stop the world from becoming what they warned, he had the feeling she would not trust them or their claims for a long time. Not unless he could definitively prove they told the proof and were not using him solely for their own goals.

"In a few weeks, the UA students will be going on a training camp trip." Hawks said quietly. "On that trip the last time, the League of Villains attacked and Katsuki Bakugo was targeted. If that attack happens again, will you believe them?"

He did not ask if she would believe him, because believing him was not the issue. Believing the voices in his head *was*.

"Perhaps." Mockingjay admitted. "But even if I believe they are from the future, even if I believe they do not consciously mean you harm, I don't think I can trust them *with your life*, Hawks. Not after..." A hand gently touched his bandaged wing. "...what you gave up for them."

Oh.

Hawks found himself struck speechless by the declaration, realizing his assumption had been a bit off the mark. Maybe Mockingjay *already* believed the voices' story. But it would *not* affect her view, because Katniss always prioritized her loved ones— in this instance, Hawks— while the voices might not. He may as well have asked her to trust a complete stranger with his life.

He should have realized Mockingjay would take issue with his being injured out of a desire to protect the voices. While she would undoubtedly do the same in his position, the fact that

the voices were causing him further grief with the Commission could not put Katniss's mind at ease.

Not after what her own 'Commission'— the Capitol— had done to her Hero partner, Finnick, when he had tried to break free and failed.

"I won't let them kill me." Hawks said quietly.

"Experience has told me it has nothing to do with 'letting'." Mockingjay replied. She pulled him into a brief hug. "Survive."

"I will." Hawks stated, eyes glassy.

Mockingjay stepped back and headed towards the elevator door. Hawks hesitantly stopped beside her as she pressed the button and waited for the lift to come up.

"We may be at a disagreement on their… methods, but your friends do not need to hide from me." she said. She stepped into the elevator but did not turn around to face him, fingers clenched. "Though to be honest, I'd rather see *you* doing your paperwork."

The elevator doors closed behind her before he could respond.

"*That could have gone better."* Pink said weakly.

"*It could have gone worse as well."* Silver pointed out.

"*She hates us."* Yellow said flatly.

She doesn't hate you, Hawks denied.

"*Pretty sure she does."*

If she does she honestly would be trying to kill you so—

"*Can you blame her?"* Green interrupted tiredly. *"We ruined Gold's life."*

Hawks felt an irrational burst of anger that they could even think that. *You did not.*

"*Didn't we? Because I don't remember you being on the Commission's hitlist the last time around."*

Hawks wondered if it was possible to literally mentally smack some sense into people. *Come on, guys. Don't make **me** be the inspiring one. Stop blaming yourselves. You didn't ask to be stuck in my head, or for me to tell the Commission to stick it. I made my choices, and I don't regret them. I know Katniss understands. She just… doesn't want me to get hurt.*

"*You've already gotten hurt."* Red murmured.

He could feel her attention shift towards his aching wings. *Mockingjay will come around once she realizes you're telling the truth. She's a naturally suspicious person, so she just*

needs some time to learn to trust you guys and see you truly don't mean me harm. Once she does, we'll have another ally to help out.

"*You're right."* Green said, but Hawks could tell he was forcing himself to agree. *"Sorry for being cynical again."*

"*You have been less cheery lately."* Pink noted.

"*Well, duh."* Yellow huffed. *"We're kind of stressed out **all** the time. Three guesses why."*

Hawks felt Red shrink away like she could not bear to hear the conversation. *Are you okay in there, Red?*

She jumped. *"Huh? Oh, yes. Of course."*

Hawks frowned. *Are you sure?*

"*I am simply still unnerved by today's… unexpected events."*

She was hiding something. Hawks wondered if the other voices could tell.

He did not push her, trusting her to talk when she was ready. He glanced towards the files Mockingjay had gathered on the Meta Liberation Army and momentarily put them aside— he could look them over with Miruko— opening up the folder on the man who might be Amplifier. He also grabbed the other folders pertaining to the serial killer case. One look at the growing pile made him feel as if an entire building was sitting on his shoulders. He knew it was too much to hope for that he and his sidekicks could solve the case before he inevitably had to meet with his 'partner'.

It looked like he was inevitably going to meet Endeavor for the first time since he found out the man's dark secrets.

XXXXXXX

This is so damn stupid, even for me.

Every part of Twice was in agreement for once. Hiding out in Fukuoka was an awful idea. It was a terrible idea. Hawks probably knew he was a Villain by now and that woman he met at the bar who was also probably a Hero definitely did, yet here Twice was, running around in their city.

No Heroes had dropped out of the sky to arrest him yet, so Twice did not do the smart thing and leave. Instead he moved from place to place in Fukuoka, keeping an eye on the news and the sky. Though he had to wonder if Hawks would arrest him if he saw him.

Deep down, he doubted it even though he knew he shouldn't. Twice was an official League member now. He had taken part in an attempted convoy attack and everything.

Yet Hawks *still* helped him and treated him like a person.

Damn it. Twice had hoped to escape these conflicted feelings by getting some ill-advised fresh air but now they were worse than ever.

He glanced at his phone but there was no word from Dabi or Giran. He shoved it back into his pocket and pulled his hood over his head, one hand remaining clasped around his mask.

That woman's advice to befriend Hawks was off the table, and the League was laying low, leaving Twice alone again. Damn, he hated the quiet. It was too loud. Yet there was little he could do about that.

All he could do now was wait.

Free Falling

As the day passed, Miruko still did not respond to Hawks's texts or calls. He would like to say he was perfectly cool-headed about that but no, he *really* wasn't and was in fact on the verge of panicking and sending half his Agency to go find her. Instead of doing that, he first did the logical thing and checked the Hero Network.

According to it she was busy.

Hawks did the next logical thing and texted Toshinori, Tensei, and Best Jeanist to see if any of them had heard from her. He got three negatives within a few minutes, followed by another text from Toshinori asking if he was alright and then a new message from Tokoyami mentioning his cousin had arrived. Hawks told Toshinori he was fine and would call him later, acknowledged Tokoyami's supposed relative and asked when he wanted to work on that project they had talked about, and checked the Hero Network again.

Miruko was still 'busy'.

Still.

After over a day.

Hawks ran towards the window of his office.

Mockingjay intercepted him before he could reach it. "Where are you going?"

"To find Rumi." Hawks showed her his phone screen, which was filled with unread messages to the missing Rabbit Hero. "Call me paranoid but she hasn't responded to *anything* in over twenty-four hours *or* been seen by the news who have been hounding everyone close to me *and* I highly doubt she forgot her phone somewhere—"

"I'll find her." Mockingjay interrupted. "You stay here."

Hawks's phone vibrated. He checked the screen, only to feel crushing disappointment when he saw it was a text from Aizawa. He was requesting a meeting at his apartment at UA. Before Hawks could hope his day might get a little better, Aizawa sent another message saying Eri would not be there. Hawks confirmed he would arrive in a few hours and looked to Mockingjay.

"Looks like Aizawa gets to babysit me next."

"We just want you to live." Mockingjay said bluntly.

Hawks managed a wry smile. "I know."

Mockingjay left first and he followed ten minutes later, dressed in civilian clothes.

Before he could head towards the door, Shatterpoint intercepted and steered him away from it with a hand on his elbow.

"The press is outside." he said briefly.

"Have they heard about the head?" Hawks asked tiredly.

"Not yet."

Hawks grimaced but let Shatterpoint lead him down a level and out the back entrance. Neither Present Mic, Fatgum, or Ingenium were waiting for him with a car. Instead Shatterpoint's nondescript vehicle was parked outside.

"*Are we sure—?"*

Shatterpoint doesn't work for the Commission. Hawks interrupted before Purple could finish.

"*Are you absolutely certain?"* he asked suspiciously.

Positive. Hawks struggled not to smile. *Who's the paranoid one now?*

"*Hmph."*

Hawks sat in the passenger seat and watched the city fly by, wishing he was literally flying. As more and more sky passed, bright and blue and open, he began to wonder if he would be able to ever again. He wanted to claim that type of thinking was melodramatic, but after the Commission had turned on him so quickly and decisively, things he always thought were stable about his world turned out to be easily altered. Facts like how the Commission would always repress him but would never destroy him, and how they may cage him but he could still fly with his wings were no longer the case.

The Commission already thought he was beyond saving. To them, he had gone from a rebellious but caged Hero to a threat in an instant, all because he decided he would not accept their 'kindness' any longer. He would not dig a grave, lie in it, and let them bury him. He was not free, but he found himself wondering if he could get there someday. Somehow.

It wasn't the most impossible dream he had ever heard of.

The Commission knew something was 'wrong' with him, but their own belief of 'public perception above all'— and UA's meddling— meant they could not drag Hawks out of his office or risk exposing themselves as the villains. Hawks and his Quirks were not worth revealing the Commission's dark side to the public they swore they protected.

The biggest threat— if only because they were on the 'Heroes' side'— to Hawks and the voices already *knew* something had happened to him. Miruko did not know the whole story, but Mockingjay and Aizawa did, even though the former did not fully believe them yet.

And Hawks…

A series of conflicted emotions swelled up inside him— among which was undeniably panic as he once again realized what he'd done— but he pushed it down.

I don't want to have to hide anymore.

"*Gold?"* Green asked hesitantly.

I don't want to have to hide you anymore, Hawks elaborated.

"*You have to."* Purple argued. *"We can't tell everyone—"*

We don't have to tell everyone anything. I can just let you out around the UA teachers. They can think what they want. I don't care.

"*I think you do."* Pink said carefully.

"*That's not a good idea, Gold."* Silver warned.

Maybe, but you guys deserve better, Hawks replied obstinately. *You can only come out when we're Ennea, or if you're pretending to be me. That isn't fair. You deserve better. Besides,what are they going to do? Call me crazy? Try to lock me in a psych ward? Report me to the Commission who already hates my guts? Actually, I hope they do so we could weasel out their agents at UA…*

"*For the hundredth time, there are no Commission agents at UA."* Green said tiredly.

Right.

"*Do I even need to say that I know you don't believe me?"*

Hmm. Hawks turned away from the view of the empty sky and stared at the car ceiling instead. *Do **you** want to do this? It would give you more time to do things other than sit in the dorms or missions.*

He could feel their reluctance. But he could also feel their desire. Having a body to call their own was something one did not think they took for granted until they found themselves without them. Their discomfort slowly shifted towards agreement and Hawks himself felt an odd sense of... acceptance, like something was finally normal for once. Sure they would have to use his body more but what else was new? He remembered Mockingjay's warning and quickly cut off that line of thought.

"*Before we do that..."* Red's presence shivered nervously. *"I think we need to discuss something."*

"*About time."* Orange huffed. *"I'm sick of you being twitchy and moping around."*

"*Orange."* Silver admonished.

Red ignored them. *"Silver, do you recall our mission with Nighteye?"*

"*How could I forget? We rescued Eri."* Silver said promptly. *"What does—?"*

"*White, where did you learn that move to disarm an opponent?"* Red interrupted.

"*From Gunhead."* White responded. He paused. *"Wait, I never—"*

"*Orange, how did you train?"*

"*What kind of stupid question is that?"* Orange demanded. *"I picked up garbage at Dago..."* He trailed off.

Red's voice remained level. *"Yellow, what can you tell me about iron and its structure?"*

"*Iron, a lustrous, ductile, malleable silver-grey metal of group VIII on the periodic table. Atomic number 26, has an atomic weight of 55.847 and an electron configuration of 3d6 4s2 —"* Yellow stopped. *"Um."*

"*What the hell."* Orange breathed.

"*Red?"* Green demanded.

Red took a shuddering breath. *"I think we're losing track of ourselves. We're **not** merging or anything— I... I **think?**— but we seem to be taking on pieces of each other along with some memories too. When we talked about Aizawa's expulsion threats, Purple said '**our**' class when he was never in Class 1-A."*

Purple's alarm lanced through them like a whip before he contained it.

"*Green keeps having bouts of Purple-like cynicism and disbelief in people."* Pink said suddenly. *"No offense, Purple."*

"*None taken."*

"*Yellow's been thinking more critically."* Orange input rather callously.

"*Orange has been nicer."* Yellow shot back. His yelp suggested Orange had either smacked or tackled him.

"***Stop** joking!"* Pink snapped. *"This is serious!"* She faltered and her panic choked Hawks. *"Is that me?"*

"Yes it is." Yellow reassured her hastily.

*"How do you **know**?"* Pink asked, voice trembling.

"I... er... Well, it's obvious...?"

"There are other instances of crossover. Gold was very nervous when he called Tensei." Silver mentioned quickly. *"Green-like nervous."*

"*There's also Gold's irrational trust of Aizawa and Fatgum despite not knowing them for long."* Purple added lowly.

Green moaned. *"Great. Just what we needed. We already knew about the merging feelings and memory-sharing but **this**..."*

"*This is not **sharing** memories. This is our memories **transferring** to each other so we believe they are our own."* White said solemnly. *"How much more will it continue to affect us?"*

Hawks turned his head towards the window and hoped Shatterpoint did not notice the horrified look on his face. He took a breath and exhaled, watching it fog up the window.

This is just another reason to let you out more. We need to keep our individuality.

"*We're **not** losing it."* Orange snarled.

Hawks could not tell if it was a promise or a desperate claim. *I know. So… what do you think?*

He felt the voices converse among themselves.

"*I admit… being out more would be nice."* Red said.

"*And it's not like their first conclusion will be 'time travelers.'"* Purple mused.

"*Isn't that a bad thing?"* Pink asked.

"*Not if our enemy finds out."*

"*Point taken."*

"*To hell with what others think of us."* Yellow said cheerily. *"We have a world to save!"*

Hawks smiled and desperately hoped the optimism he felt was his own.

Shatterpoint pulled up outside of UA— which was free of reporters, the lucky jerks— and put the car in park. Hawks got out but before he could shut the door, Shatterpoint caught his eye.

"Hawks. Whatever happens, we have your back. All of us."

Hawks blinked at him in surprise and felt himself relax. "Thanks."

He shut the door and Shatterpoint drove off. Before Hawks could worry about being locked outside of the grounds— being kidnapped in front of UA would not be a good look for any Heroic party involved— Aizawa appeared and ushered him inside.

"Hey." Hawks greeted. He glanced around, looking for a messy head of white hair. "Where is Eri?"

"With a student." Aizawa said briefly.

Translation: he did not want Hawks to know. Again. It was starting to become a pattern. Did Hawks do something wrong then, so now he could not see Eri? Or did Aizawa think she needed to be kept out of the line of fire since the Commission would be out for Hawks? He hid a wince and walked alongside Aizawa towards the teachers' housing.

"Someone I know?" he asked carefully.

Aizawa shrugged, hands comfortably placed in his pockets."Probably not. But your… friends do."

Hawks narrowed his eyes. "Your tone suggests he is a very punchable person."

"*And there's some Orange."*

"*Yellow.*" Pink said shakily. *"Will you please **not**."*

"About them..." Hawks chewed on his lip and lowered his voice. "Do you think you could try to find a Quirk that could help my… *friends* get their own bodies?"

The voices' surprise reverberated through him.

"*What."* Green asked flatly.

Hawks held up a hand to stall Aizawa and turned his attention inward. *Sorry for not discussing it with you beforehand, but you know you shouldn't have to stay in here forever, right? And… I know they're your past selves, but it doesn't feel **right** putting you in their bodies. This Shoto and Iida had so many different experiences than White and Silver. They could be considered… I don't know, 'alternate selves' or something by this point. And who knows about the rest of your… other selves.*

Green was at a loss for words. *"That's true but… we..."*

Hawks waited patiently but only got vague feelings of bewilderment. He identified the source. *Your mission will be completed someday. You'll save the future. When that happens, you can live your lives. You deserve better than to be stuck in my head until I die.*

Their stunned silence turned into consideration.

Hawks nodded to Aizawa to indicate he was done talking with his head-roommates.

"We may not be able to find a Quirk capable of such a transfer." Aizawa warned. "At best, there may be multiple Quirks needed, which means multiple parties must be involved. One to create a permanent body and one to successfully transfer the mind, at *least*. The closest person I know of with such a Quirk is Twice, and his clones are fragile and temporary."

"It's just something to start thinking about." Hawks replied easily. "Until then, my friends want to be out more. And I'd like them to be, too."

There was a long, uncomfortable pause before Aizawa spoke, voice equally low. "Are you implying what I think you are? Telling my coworkers about the future is too risky—"

"I don't want to tell them about the future." Hawks hastened to correct him. "I just want to let my headspace roommates out every once in a while. I'll let your coworkers draw their own conclusions."

Aizawa frowned. "That may not be wise—"

"It's not about wisdom. It's about letting my friends have some freedom." Hawks said stubbornly. "And if your friends are as good as you say, they won't hurt me, no matter what they think."

That was a bit of a low blow but Hawks wanted to see his reaction. If Aizawa said no, it implied his fellow teachers were not to be trusted, reinforcing the fears Hawks denied he had.

"You'd let them think you have multiple personalities." Aizawa stated flatly.

Hawks nodded. "I'm tired of pretending to be fine. I'm tired of having to sneak around. They are too. With the whole… Commission issue, things haven't exactly gone our way lately. We're all so… so…" He felt his shoulders slump. "…tired."

Aizawa slowly leaned forward and put a hand on his arm. "Don't forget you've put Shigaraki away." he said lowly. "Overhaul as well. You're changing things for the better. I cannot imagine how stressful it must be to live like you are, but you've been performing beyond what everyone would expect of you."

Hawks did not know what to say to that so he decided to say nothing at all until they were safely in Aizawa's apartment. Though Hawks had previously thought Rumi's apartment was safe too, and look how *that* ended up.

Hawks's heart crawled into his throat but he cleared it. "Uh. I hate to be an awful guest and drop this on you but my friends told me something important recently and I didn't want to say it over the phone—"

"*You are **not** telling him about Shirakumo!"* Green snapped.

Hawks flinched. *I wasn't going to. Traitor, remember?*

Green deflated. *"Right. Sorry."*

Hawks blinked and realized Aizawa was looking at him expectantly. He could not meet his gaze and instead tried to look down at his own lap, only for his eyes to inadvertently flick to Aizawa's face once more. "There's a traitor at UA. We don't know who it is but… they're likely a staff member or in Class 1-B or 1-A."

Aizawa did not react outwardly to the news that one of his friends or precious students may be working for the villains. "The USJ incident."

Hawks managed not to look at the scar below Aizawa's eye. "Yeah."

Aizawa remained *seemingly* unaffected. "I see. I assume your eight friends are innocent."

"Definitely. There's no assumption needed." Hawks reassured him. "We had no mental barriers at first and everything was open. We would've found out if any of them were the traitor." He tipped his head in thought. "If the League finds out about me being 'schizophrenic', we might be able to narrow down the suspects to the teachers."

"That could be beneficial." Aizawa murmured.

"…Also I accidentally told Fumikage Tokoyami about the Commission's reconditioning habits." Hawks whispered.

Red flickered to life in Aizawa's eyes. "*Why?*" he snarled with utter vitriol.

Hawks honestly wished he could sink into the floor. "He said the phrase we use if we're being sent to reconditioning." he said, voice going toneless as he gave his report of his failure. "I panicked and realized he wasn't in danger, but explained it to him."

Hawks could see Aizawa take a deep breath.

For an irrational moment, he thought Aizawa might actually grab him, or shake him, or even strike him. Hawks did not apologize for his mistake, though he shifted back and tensed. He knew he messed up but apologies were useless in this type of encounter. He also knew from experience that expecting an apology to defuse the situation— like a free pass to forgiveness — would only make things worse. So he held his breath and waited, watching for sudden movements and red eyes.

But Aizawa was not the Commission, and no matter how angry he was, he did not raise a hand against Hawks. It did not mean he was okay with this news.

"Do you realize what danger you've—"

Hawks forced his expression to remain neutral but he must have let something slip onto his face because Aizawa stopped. In fact, he deflated.

"I'm not going to hurt you."

Hawks avoided his eyes. *Black* eyes. "I never thought—"

"So you're shrinking away and sitting on the corner of the couch for no reason?" Aizawa asked flatly.

"I wasn't going to run." Hawks denied truthfully.

Aizawa seemed to age another ten years. "Eri does that, too."

Hawks nibbled on his lip and forced himself not to bite through it.

"Please don't compare us." he said as politely as he could manage.

Aizawa inclined his head. "So the Commission may target Tokoyami specifically then?"

Hawks's throat closed up and he nodded mutely.

A crease appeared between Aizawa's eyebrows. "Has a Hero been sent to watch over him and his family?"

Hawks nodded again. His phone vibrated and he yanked it out of his pocket. It was a text from Mockingjay.

'Found her. Stay where you are.'

The knots in Hawks's chest loosened up. He put his phone in his pocket again. *Rumi is okay.*

The crease grew deeper. "You did not speak."

In an instant, it felt like all the energy Hawks had left was torn out of him. The knots came back full force, squeezing his heart and lungs. He stared listlessly at Aizawa and showed him the message from Mockingjay before turning inward.

Sorry. Could someone step in? I need a second…

Pink gave a distressed sound. *"No no no. You're doing fine—"*

Hawks's vision went grey.

XXXXXXX

Aizawa watched the light fade from Hawks's eyes. Before he could do more than pull out his phone, fingers poised to call Recovery Girl, a shudder passed through Hawks and he blinked. His shoulders slumped and he slouched against the back of the couch, arms crossed.

"Hey, Sensei."

Aizawa processed everything from the posture to the subtle lilts in speech. "…Purple?"

Shinso smiled wearily. "Yes, it's me. Gold drifted. Honestly, I expected him to slip away sooner than this. He's a bit stressed."

Aizawa kept his expression neutral so he would not stare. The change in Hawks was so obvious Aizawa had to wonder how no one else had figured out he wasn't himself all the time. Everything from the sarcastic drawl Purple spoke with to the way he comfortably sat like nothing in the world could bother him screamed Hitoshi Shinso.

"Did something else happen?" Aizawa asked.

Shinso— *Purple* nodded. "The Commission stuff, obviously. And he feels guilty about Tokoyami." There was no judgment in Purple's voice but Aizawa could not say he wasn't being accused of increasing that stress. "Mockingjay caught Green and figured out he wasn't Gold. Gold told her the truth but she doesn't believe us. I think it hit him harder than he wants to admit." Purple scowled. "Plus we found out we have to work with Endeavor on a case…"

Aizawa's eyes narrowed. "What does Endeavor have to do with anything?"

Purple cocked his head and sealed his lips with a zipping motion. That move was a more Hawks-like one. "Not my thing to share."

He spoke with dry amusement, like he said a secret joke only he was privy to, but his eyes glittered calculatingly as if he were gauging Aizawa's reaction. Aizawa knew his apprentice. Shinso would not let that slip by accident. He continued to stare.

Purple sighed loudly and shifted to lay his arms along the back of the couch. "Yes, this is weird. Yes, I can see your face twitching." He raised a golden eyebrow. "If we're going to do this, you should get used to it. We need someone to pretend we're normal."

Despite himself, Aizawa snorted. "Trust me when I say you are far from the strangest case I've seen in my life."

Purple's lips curved upward. "I really missed you, Sensei. We all did."

"How did I die?" Aizawa asked bluntly.

Purple looked him right in the eye. "Trying to save someone you cared about."

It wasn't an answer but it said a lot.

Aizawa did not continue to press him. "Did Hawks share if he wanted to tell Eri about his friends?"

Purple shook his head adamantly. "He doesn't. If we tell Eri she might be able to identify us as Ennea. The original Ennea, I mean. We don't want her to have to carry that secret."

Aizawa stared at him, unblinking. "...What."

Purple scratched his cheek, and chuckled. "Oh yeah. We forgot to mention that to you. Whoops."

Aizawa's eye twitched.

XXXXXXX

When Tokoyami received a text from Hawks telling him they should meet about the project he was struggling with, he nearly flew out the door.

Nearly, because he stopped himself just in time, reminding himself of his situation. He knew what Hawks had implied about the Commission. He had seen the reports claiming Hawks had been brutally attacked by a 'Villain'. His 'second or third cousin' and her betrothed had arrived a few hours later and Tokoyami could put two and two together. So he grabbed a bag and put random homework in it for his 'project'. Then he went up to his 'cousin'— who had black hair in a hime cut and red eyes much like his own father— and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Ai, I hate to be a bother but I need to meet with Hawks at UA. Could you…?"

"I will take you there." she said softly.

He thanked her and hurried to tell his parents where he was going. Ai's betrothed stayed with his parents while Ai drove him. And the two may actually *be* engaged to be married. It was difficult to tell whether that aspect was part of their cover or not.

The car ride was not as awkward as Tokoyami thought it may be. Ai was not the most talkative person, being rather reserved and quiet, unlike her partner who was walking sunshine. Literally. If Tokoyami did not know better, he may wonder if Hikaru was the first Quirk user. Yet unlike the baby that could radiate light from his body, Hikaru's powers were more like a sun or fireball, covering them with a fiery, shifting glow that hid most of their features.

Ai's partner would not be out of place in Endeavor's Hero Agency, though Tokoyami was hesitant to ask if that was where the two Heroes were from. And if they were, why where they here and not guarding Shoto and his family?

"You have questions." Ai noted in that soft, reserved voice of hers.

Tokoyami fiddled with his bag. "Yes."

"You may ask."

"Of course." He cleared his throat. "Do you know if Iida and Todoroki— Hawks's other interns— have… family visiting as well?"

"Tenya Iida does, though the Iida family is strong." Ai informed him. "They are there just in case. As for the Todorokis, they were turned away by Endeavor. He claims he needs no protection."

Tokoyami was not too sure about that. He knew Endeavor was strong and only Fuyumi and Shoto tended to be at the Todoroki home if his classmate's vague statements about his home life were any indication, but surely extra help could only be a good idea?

Ai pulled up to UA and Tokoyami got out. He opened his mouth to thank her for the ride, only for Ai to exit the vehicle as well. He accepted her presence and walked through the gate, heading towards the teachers' dorms. Aizawa met him at the door.

Dark eyes flicked to Ai and black eyebrows rose. "Darksphere."

"Eraserhead." she replied.

Tokoyami looked back and forth between them. "You've met."

"She's another Underground Hero." Aizawa said. "How is Sunfire?"

"Unbelievably cheerful." Ai said stoically. "And my betrothed."

Aizawa's lips curled the tiniest bit. "Congratulations."

Tokoyami still could not tell of they were *actually* together or not. Was he just oblivious?

Aizawa continued to block the doorway and pinned Tokoyami with a sharp stare. "Think before you speak, Tsukoyomi."

Tokoyami blinked at the warning, thoughts burning with confused questions. They vanished when he saw Hawks sitting on the couch.

The pictures he'd seen online did not give the full weight of how bad Hawks looked. He was nearly as pale as the walls behind him, which made the dark bruises on his face and throat stand out all the more. In places, his contusions were nearly the same color as Tokoyami's feathers. Hawks sat stiffly in a way that kept his wings away from the back of the couch. They were tattered like they had been when he first returned, with feathers bent and out of place. It looked as if someone had grabbed his wings and dug their giant fingers in. If the reports were any indication, that was not far from the truth.

Yet the worst part was not Hawks's injuries, but his forlorn expression. Gone was the smile Tokoyami was used to seeing. Gone was the joyful, mischievous light in Hawks's eyes. He did not appear to notice that Tokoyami had arrived. Instead he stared at the wall with an exhausted look on his face.

Gold eyes abruptly moved to Tokoyami and Hawks smiled. He immediately looked better, but Tokoyami could not fully believe it was real.

Hawks's mouth moved but no sound came out.

Tokoyami recognized a greeting, however. "Hello, Hawks-sensei."

He glanced back and noticed Aizawa speaking lowly with Ai in the hall. He sat across from Hawks and placed his bag beside him.

Hawks shot it a questioning look.

"I thought it wise to bring school work."

Hawks smiled. His mouth moved and he paused. A horrified look crossed his face and his pale cheeks gained splotches of red.

"Sor...ry." He said as if it physically hurt to speak. "Forget to… speak sometimes. When stressed."

"It is alright." Tokoyami said even though it was not alright at all.

He knew Hawks had been tortured. How bad was his mental health because of that? Witnesses had heard screaming. Hawks had been in enough pain to scream loudly enough for others to hear him, but no one had gone to help.

Tokoyami tried to tell himself they were civilians who stood little chance against whatever could incapacitate a Pro Hero but he could not pretend to be fine with their lack of action. They had not even contacted the Hero Network or police. Had they thought someone else would do something?

Tokoyami cut off that line of thought and asked the biggest question consuming his thoughts. "Did the Commission do this to you?"

Hawks's golden eyes dulled and he nodded.

"Did they make you disappear?"

He shook his head and bit his lip, eyes widening with alarm as he looked at Tokoyami. The Hero student was not foolish. He knew what his mentor was thinking about. Before Tokoyami could do more than acknowledge the lump of fear in his throat, Hawks seemed to shake himself.

"We need to talk about that." He said as if he'd never had trouble speaking a few minutes ago. Hawks leaned forward, gaze sharp. "Have you told anyone about what you learned?"

Tokoyami shook his head. "No."

"Good. Keep it that way."

Tokoyami opened his mouth to object.

"What would telling your classmates do?"

Tokoyami hesitated. "They'd… know the Commission cannot be trusted."

"And?" Hawks asked patiently. "How would that benefit a clandestine investigation?"

"You're investigating them?" Tokoyami asked.

"Not me." Hawks corrected. "But other Heroes. I… suppose it was inevitable." His eyes closed wearily but he shook himself again, and when they opened Tokoyami could see his eyes were still a little unfocused. "Don't you worry about me, you hear? The Pros are handling guard detail."

"I want to help." Tokoyami protested.

Hawks's hand landed on his head and he ruffled his feathers. "I know. But this is not your responsibility. You're still a student, and a kid. Let the adults try to bring down this Villain, okay?" He paused and a shocked look crossed his face as if he could not believe what he just said. Then he smiled. It was real this time. Real, but terribly sad. "I know it's frustrating but could you let me keep you away from them? They've already hurt too many kids."

Tokoyami could not argue against that. "Fine." He said reluctantly. "But if you're in trouble you'll tell me, right? I swear I'll get help instead of trying to act on my own."

"Mayb…" Hawks trailed off, eyes glazing slightly. "Okay. I'll hold you to that." He chuckled. "Did you learn from me after all?"

"Yes." Tokoyami said firmly.

Hawks's eyes flipped wide as if he had not expected a genuine response. He cleared his throat. "Well you're in luck. In case you missed it, I get to teach you again, *fledgling*."

"I am overjoyed." Tokoyami said gravely. "But please do not call me that horrible nickname in front of my class. After all, us bird people need to stick together."

The blinding grin Hawks gave him brought All Might's to shame.

XXXXXXX

Hawks returned to his office to sleep that night. It wasn't like he could go back to Miruko's— and he doubted he would be able to sleep there anyway— so it was the only thing he could do. When he arrived, Miruko stood at his desk, flipping through one of the folders he knew he had put away. Hawks hardly cared.

"Rumi! You're okay!" He ran up to her only to hesitate. "...*Are* you okay?"

Miruko set the folder down and smiled at him. There were tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry." She abruptly moved in and hugged him. "I'm *so* sorry."

Hawks blinked in confusion but soon realized what she was thinking. "It wasn't you. I angered them on my own."

"Do you really believe that?" Miruko asked thickly. "Or are you in denial again?"

That stung. Hawks did not let it show. "I'm sure it was me. I told them no and they reacted like I should have expected."

Her arms tightened. "Hawks, Amplifier almost *killed* you this time."

"No he didn't." Hawks reassured her. He tried to shift out of her grip but she did not let him go. He resigned himself to staying there. "Look at the bright side. I'm officially on their hit list so you don't need to go on that mission."

"What will they do to you?" Miruko asked quietly.

Hawks shrugged with feigned apathy.

"*Hawks*."

"Kill me, if I'm lucky." Hawks said blithely. "Recondition me or use me for parts if I'm not." He saw her expression. "Hey, I'm not going to let them catch me so you don't need to worry."

"'Letting' usually isn't a factor." She clenched her jaw. "I'm still doing that mission."

Hawks scowled. "You don't have to—"

"If I do, they'll be a little less pissed at you." She continued as if he had not spoken.

Hawks's fingers clenched. "So now *I'm* playing rebel while *you* become a Commission lackey? *No*."

"Too bad I didn't ask for your opinion." Miruko said coldly.

"This isn't about opinions." Hawks snapped. "You could *die*, Rumi!"

"Well, *you **will** die!*" Miruko exploded. Her expression crumpled. "And it'll be my fault."

Hawks's fluffed feathers went flat. "I doubt that. You didn't make me say no, Rumi."

"It's not that." She sank on the couch and put her head in her hands. He sat beside her and waited as the minutes ticked by. "I've been investigating the Commission."

Hawks sighed. "I know—"

"—ever since you disappeared." Miruko's voice dropped to a whisper. "I thought they might have vanished you and looked for proof. Instead I found… everything else. Apparently someone noticed." She slowly reached out and ran a hand through his hair. "If they catch you, they'll give you to *him* again, won't they?"

Hawks's fingertips went cold but he forced out a fake-confused "Hmm?"

Miruko just looked more distraught. "Why didn't you tell me, Baby Bird?"

Although he knew he was only delaying the inevitable, Hawks played dumb. "Tell you what?"

"What Kaetsu did to you. What the Commission *let* him do to you."

She doesn't know everything. If she did, the Commission HQ would no longer be standing.

Hawks tensed despite that self-reassurance, though he did not shift away from her. "He didn't do anything—"

"Fearful Fantasy." Miruko said.

Hawks's mouth went dry. "Stop."

"That's his Quirk." Miruko continued.

Hawks's heart hammered. "Stop."

"...Gold?" Green asked worriedly.

"It lets him identify his targets' fears through scent and manifest them into reality while giving him a sense of euphoria. When you were sixteen he—"

"*Stop*." Hawks choked.

Miruko stopped. Guilt flashed across her face. "Sorry. I shouldn't have..."

Hawks's lips twisted into a smile. "It's fine. Nothing happened."

Miruko started petting his hair again. The movement was soothing and he felt himself relax.

"It wasn't your—"

"Nothing happened." Hawks whispered.

She didn't argue so they sat in silence. He reached for a feather but she guided his hand away.

Hawks's eyes stung but he did not cry. Heroes did not cry. "So… um. Where were you today, Rumi?"

"I was following a lead." she said vaguely.

"Should I ask?"

Miruko shook her head.

"Is it him?" Hawks asked quietly despite knowing the Commission had no bugs here.

She did not answer.

Hawks looked down at his lap. "Did Mockingjay tell you about Amplifier?"

"Yeah."

"Do you have to pay for your broken door?"

"No."

He bit his lip. "Did you find a new apartment?"

"I have one in mind." she said, not mentioning that it was his fault she had to move.

Hawks swallowed an apology. "So apparently I'm moving to UA."

Her steely gaze softened. "They'll keep you as safe as they can."

Hawks blinked rapidly. *They shouldn't.* "And what about you?"

"Don't you worry about me." Rumi said, and Hawks was reminded of his own words to Tokoyami earlier that day. "You worry only about you, okay? I am not going to reprimand you for thinking about yourself."

Hawks bit his lip so hard he tasted blood. "I—"

"I'm not going to punish you for refusing to say yes." she continued.

"Rumi, I didn't—"

"I'm not going to demand you talk to me, but I'm here for you. *Always*. No judgment. No punishments. No lectures." She petted his head. "You're allowed to take care of yourself and stretch your wings, Baby Bird."

Hawks blinked with his human eyelids. Weirdly, his sight grew blurry. "I don't need you to tell me that."

"Okay." She murmured.

They sat in silence and she kept combing her fingers through his hair. It was probably a stupid bird thing but he felt perfectly content to let her. He really was a baby bird.

"Hawks…" Miruko stopped brushing his hair. "If you wanted to do the right thing, but knew people would get hurt because you did it, would you still do it?"

Hawks studied her features but none of her thoughts showed on her shadowed face. "It depends." he said. "Do those people know you're doing the 'right' thing?"

"The important ones do."

"Will it *help* people?" he emphasized.

"Yes. But… the people who it will help are also ones that could get hurt."

"You're not usually so cryptic." Hawks murmured. "Does this have to do with your mission? I told you, you don't need to do it."

She did not argue. She just smiled at him. He desperately wished it wasn't so sad.

He leaned on her shoulder and curled up against her side, like he used to when he was a Pro Hero fresh out of the Commission's dungeon, terrified of showing weakness but so *desperate* for any type of affection he thought punishment may be worth it. Except *that*. Anything but Kaetsu was an acceptable price. Anything *he* could give, anyway.

"Promise you won't die." Hawks whispered.

"I won't." Miruko said, equally softly. "Promise you won't die."

"I won't." he said back.

They both hoped they could uphold that vow.

Pyrophobia

If Shoto can work with him, so can I, Hawks reminded himself as he stood in the lobby of his Agency and waited for Endeavor to arrive.

Endeavor had decided it was time for him and Hawks to actually work together, and while Hawks once would have looked forward to such a partnership with excitement, now he only felt weary exhaustion. At least Shatterpoint was with him. Hawks hated having someone else there to bear witness to the inevitable drama but it was probably best he wasn't alone.

Hawks's phone buzzed and he looked down. Toshinori had sent him a video of a Black Labrador trying to herd a swarm of tiny kittens, poking them with his nose in a futile attempt to keep them together. Their tiny mews filled the air and Hawks chuckled, his foul mood fading. Sometimes he'd swear Toshinori was psychic due to his timing.

"Daaawwwwww." Pink cooed.

Hawks showed the video to Shatterpoint and the normally stoic Hero's lips twitched suspiciously.

The brief reprieve was mercilessly smothered as the Agency doors opened and Endeavor walked in. Hawks immediately closed the video. He inhaled. Exhaled.

I can work with him.

"Yes, you can." White said.

It felt less like agreement and more like permission.

"Thank you for coming, Endeavor." Hawks greeted formally.

Shatterpoint shot him a searching look.

"Of course." Endeavor said with his usual harsh expression. His gaze flicked to Hawks's bandaged wings and his lip curled. Was he upset by the sight of Hawks's injuries or annoyed that he was injured in the first place? "Where is the latest crime scene?"

"The body was found in Ōhori Park but we suspect the murder took place elsewhere." Hawks handed him the file and watched him flip through it. "It's not far from here if—"

"Do you have a map marking the other crime sites?" Endeavor interrupted.

Hawks nodded and showed him. He remained silent as Endeavor scrutinized the map. If the older Hero noticed his lack of chatter, he kept it to himself.

"The killings are random." Endeavor murmured. "There are no discernible patterns."

"That's what we thought." Hawks said. "However, based on the previous—"

"Take me to the latest site." Endeavor said. He frowned and crossed his arms. "We should have met there."

I thought it would be better not to since the media is still hounding my sidekicks and I. Not to mention the Commission…

Hawks kept his thoughts to himself and looked to Shatterpoint. "Do you mind giving us a ride?"

"Not at all." he said, and although his eyes were narrowed to slits, he did not say anything further.

Hawks smiled at him gratefully.

Shatterpoint sat in the driver's seat while Hawks took the passenger's, leaving Endeavor to the back seat. He looked annoyed by that but there was plenty of room for his large frame. Hawks could feel eyes on his back, or more likely his wings.

"You look like a bedraggled seagull." Endeavor huffed. "Couldn't you at least attempt to make yourself presentable?"

Hawks repressed a sigh. "Until I detach my individual feathers, my wings are a part of my body, like an arm. They are a bit sensitive due to the damage so it's not the best idea to touch them. And the feathers may be a little ragged but they're still functional. I'm not going to waste feathers to look pretty."

"Hmph." Endeavor grunted. "You could still try to at least look like a Hero."

Hawks decided he could not do this today so he did not argue. "Yes, sir."

Hawks saw Shatterpoint bite his tongue to keep himself from speaking. Literally.

"If Endeavor makes one comment about Gold 'learning respect' I'm punching him." Pink growled.

"Is that you or Orange?" Red asked cautiously.

*" **Me** ."*

Instead of placating Endeavor, Hawks's response only made his scowl deepen.

"I see your recent failure to fight off that Villain has not helped your attitude." he said irritably.

"*He did **not** just imply what I think he did, did he?"* Green breathed.

"*Does he realize he is blaming you?"* Silver demanded, furious.

"*Let me shock him."* Yellow begged. *"Just a zap."*

Hawks stared at his former idol tiredly. "Endeavor? You don't know what kind of Hell my week has been, so *please* keep your unwanted opinions to yourself."

Endeavor's shocked expression would be more appropriate if Hawks had given in to his inner Orange and cussed him out. It might have even been gratifying if Hawks did not currently feel like giving up and throwing himself off a building just to escape the other man.

*"You don't **really** want to, right dumbass?"* Orange asked with uncharacteristic nervousness.

Hawks paused to think about it.

The fact that he had to think about it made him realize he was a *bit* more done with everything than he had assumed. He forced his shoulders not to slump.

No, he said belatedly. *I have to take care of you guys.*

"*We'd like you to take care of yourself, too."* Red said warily.

I'm not going to actually throw myself off a building. It was a tasteless and inappropriate joke. Besides, I have wings.

"*That's not the point and you know it."* Purple stated.

I—

"*We want you to live."* Pink said bluntly.

Hawks repressed a wince. *You're overthinking this. I said it was just a joke—*

"*We want you to live."* Pink repeated fiercely. *"You **deserve** to live."*

A heavy hand landed on Hawks's shoulder and he tensed, clutching his hands together and squeezing them tightly. Endeavor's palm was slightly above temperature. Not burning, but Hawks knew that could easily change.

"Endeavor, you forgot to put your seat belt on." Shatterpoint said. His voice was its normal, cool tone but Hawks could see his hands were clenched tightly around the steering wheel.

Endeavor leaned back and did as he was asked without a word.

The rest of the ride was uncomfortably silent. Shatterpoint kept shooting Endeavor neutral looks in the rear view mirror. From him, that may as well be a death glare. Hawks could not bring himself to act peppy and chatter to break the tension.

He was so *tired* of acting like he was okay.

—with Endeavor.

He was tired of acting like he was okay with Endeavor.

He was *not* tired of acting like he was okay with *everything* in general.

He wasn't at that point yet.

They arrived at the scene, where a couple police officers stood watch by lines of yellow tape. The area had been closed off for the investigation but a few civilians lingered, curious as to what was happening. Hawks took note of the faces in the crowd as one of the officers nodded to him and let the Heroes in.

Shatterpoint stayed with the officers to ask more questions while Hawks and Endeavor approached. An outline was drawn on the path in front of them. The arms were outstretched while the legs were tucked under. There was no circle up top where the head should be, only a straight line across the neck. Apparently, the body had been found in a position like a worshiping bow. In life, it spoke of reverence and loyalty. In death, the position was rather mocking.

Endeavor paced around the outline and crouched beside it. "He purposely posed the body this way." he murmured. "But what kind of message was he trying to send?"

"Message: 'I fucking hate this guy, he's a pawn, and I want you to know it.'" Orange growled.

"Orange—" Silver paused. *"You may have a point."*

"I believe this killing may have been more personal than the others." Hawks told Endeavor. "Himura might have even known the killer…"

Hawks remembered Himura was Amplifier, a Commission agent, and paused as he realized the killer just might an agent as well. A rogue, maybe?

"Wouldn't the Commission keep you off this case then?" Green asked. *"They like to cover up things like this."*

Hawks had no answer to that.

Endeavor did not ask him to continue his line of thought. Instead the Hero's sharp blue eyes spotted something on the forest floor. Hawks followed his gaze but saw nothing of interest in the dirt.

"What are you…?" Hawks looked up to see Endeavor was moving away.

He did not even glance his way. Hawks might as well be another tree in the background. With a heavy sigh, he followed him away from the crime scene.

Before, Hawks would ask 'You see something, big guy?'

Before, he'd make exaggerated faces and sigh at the tedious work to break the quiet.

Before, he'd do everything he could to slowly get on Endeavor's nerves until he exploded because he thought the other Hero took everything way too seriously and really should lighten up.

Now, Hawks remained silent as he followed Endeavor through the woods. He did not voice his opinion or fill the air with inane babble. He did not linger too close or ask what Endeavor was doing. Instead he merely followed like a servant who knew better than to speak unless he was spoken to.

Hawks should do better to act like nothing was amiss, but deep down he knew it was a waste of energy. The change in his demeanor would be obvious to anyone who knew him the slightest bit and Endeavor had to have noticed. Apparently he did not care. The bitter side of Hawks— one he knew was not influenced by the voices— wondered if Endeavor found his silence preferable.

Abruptly, Endeavor stopped. Hawks nearly ran into his back but halted just in time.

Endeavor's frown deepened. "It's gone."

"What is?" Hawks asked.

Endeavor shot him an annoyed glare. "The trail."

"Right." Hawks murmured. He squinted at the ground. "Do you have infrared vision or something? Because I didn't see a trail." The tone he used was one he saved for small talk with those he did not really want to speak with. Polite, reserved, and hiding all of his emotions.

Despite that, Endeavor's expression grew absolutely frigid. "I'm growing tired of your attitude."

Hawks was honestly perplexed. *What attitude?* "Hold up. Me being *quiet* annoys you? And here I thought you hated my chipper and loud personality." He waved vaguely, the picture of unbothered. "Sorry I'm not up to acting cheerful. I'm just having an off day—"

Endeavor stepped close to him, getting in his space and Hawks went silent, instinctively backing up a step. He had had to crane his neck to look up at his former idol's thunderous face.

"We are on a mission." Endeavor snarled. "You could at *least* act professional instead of acting like a spoiled brat."

Are we having two different conversations or am I missing something obvious? Hawks asked the voices, bewildered.

"*Something's not right. I think we should head back to the others."* White said tightly.

His nerves chaffed at Hawks and he crossed his arms, gripping his sleeves. "I *am* acting professional?" He did not intend to voice it as a question but it slipped out, sending another bolt of nerves through him and the voices. He began to inch around Endeavor. "But okay. Whatever. Let's go tell the police about your trail and—"

A heavy hand landed on his arm.

"*Enough*." Endeavor said coldly. "Don't think I haven't noticed your disrespectful attitude, *boy*."

Hawks's shoulders tensed and his wings fluffed up. He tried to force the feathers to go flat but they refused to listen to his commands. Endeavor's grip tightened enough that he knew it was going to bruise and his shoulder began to sting from heat.

It was far from the first time Endeavor had acted like this when Hawks 'stepped out of line', but for the first time, Hawks imagined *Shoto* in his place. Faster than a grass fire, anger ignited his veins and he shoved Endeavor's hand off of him.

"What are you going to do about my nonexistent 'attitude'? Shove me into a wall? Lift me by my collar? Hit me to shut me up? Burn me again cause that's *normal*?" Hawks turned away from Endeavor, ignoring White's worried exclamation. "Instead of breathing down my neck about how I live my life, how about you scrutinize your *own* damn decisions like how you treat your own family—"

Burning hands grabbed his shoulders and shoved him against the tree. Panic gripped Hawks — *White no* ***please not now***— and he did the stupid thing and froze. Endeavor yanked him up by his collar so their eyes were level and Hawks's feet dangled high off the ground.

"What did you just say?" Endeavor snarled.

"You heard me." Hawks said more steadily than he thought he could manage. He looked his former hero straight in the eye. "I know what you did to your family. Your *wife and children*. I know what you put them through. You track down and arrest abusers every other day. You had to know what you're doing is wrong. Otherwise what kind of screwed up morals do you have that you think *beating* your wife and sons is *okay*?" His eyes stung but he did not cry. He would *not* cry because he lost the gilded image he had of this man. "I can't believe I looked up to you—"

A large, burning hand grasped his throat and Hawks choked. Endeavor leaned close, flames flicking near millimeters from Hawks' face. Despite his fire, his blue eyes were ice, filled with a violent rage Hawks hoped he never got close to experiencing.

"*Who* told you this?" Endeavor demanded. When Hawks did not answer, he gave him a harsh shake. "Tell me! What I do with my family is *my* private business—"

Hawks laughed mirthlessly. It was breathless and painful, like someone had shoved cotton and glass shards into down his esophagus, but he couldn't stop.

"You *do* know it's abuse." he cackled so he would not break down. "You can hide behind your bullshit 'privacy' excuses all you want but you *know* what you did was wrong so you're — *Mmpf!*"

Endeavor clamped a hand over his mouth. Hawks felt the irrational desire to laugh more despite the uncomfortable heat coming from the other Hero's palm.

"You will keep your childish attempts at slander to yourself." Endeavor said coldly.

Hawks glared back at him and jerked his head, forcing the hand off his mouth so he could speak. "It's not slander and you know it." He snarled. "Why else keep your '*glorious*' eugenics and training regime to yourself other than to cover your abusive ass—"

Endeavor's grip tightened, cutting him off with a pained grunt. He could still breathe, but it was starting to hurt. Was throttling him a reflex or intentional?

"You know nothing about what I've sacrificed." Endeavor hissed. "You, the Hero *prodigy*, the lazy upstart who has been *handed* victory and never had to struggle a day in his life—"

Hawks scoffed out loud. "I think I need to interject and tell you I'm not All Might." he rasped. "That's who you're *really* mad at for supposedly 'not struggling', right? That's who you're so desperate to surpass you'd beat your family. And if you think he's never had a rough time, you're delusional. He's human, too."

"You're just as bad as All Might." Endeavor snarled. "Flaunting your status while others fall forgotten in your wake. My son should be where you are. A Top Ranked Hero known all throughout Japan." Any fleeting sympathy Hawks had was vanquished by Endeavor's next words. "His flames were more powerful than my own. If he had not been born with his mother's weakness, he would have been a *masterpiece*."

Hawks could not keep his horror off his face. "Your son *died* and *that's* how you talk about him?"

"My private life is not your concern." Endeavor repeated. There was something wild in his eyes, reminding Hawks of a feral dog. It put him on edge. "Yours, or *anyone*. So you will keep your misconceptions to yourself or there will be consequences. *Am I understood?*"

Hawks did not say it was too late. He did not say Miruko was already investigating. He did not say Endeavor would not be able to hide this forever. He merely glared at his former Hero with utter contempt.

"Never."

Endeavor shook him by the neck like an infuriated dog disciplined a misbehaving pup. Hawks would not mind as much if not for his back, which slammed into the tree. Once, twice, *thrice*. He felt the wood splinter and pain lanced through his wings but he did not utter a sound.

Shatterpoint and the police were nearby. All Hawks had to do was scream and they would come running. They would see Endeavor assaulting him and stop him. Maybe they'd arrest him. Maybe Endeavor would come up with an excuse. Maybe *Hawks himself* would come up with an excuse.

But Hawks did not scream. He did not call for help or fight back despite half the voices begging him to. The other half were in a mindless panic, torn between their desire to stop Endeavor and the realization that if someone saw what was happening, the current Number Two Hero would be exposed to be in need of anger management at the very least.

Nothing had changed when it came to exposing Endeavor like this. He was still the Number Two Hero and the next in line for Number One once All Might was out of the way. Letting anyone know he attacked Hawks and why would only lead to a media circus that would help no one, and certainly not the Todorokis.

That was what Hawks told himself as Endeavor grabbed his hair and yanked it as he shouted demands for his informant's identity in his face, his hands grew hotter and hotter.

But then Endeavor punched him, right in the throat.

Hawks was completely unprepared for such a blow, eyes going round and chest heaving as he struggled to breathe. A mad light burned in Endeavor's eyes— the crazed light of a desperate, furious man— and Hawks's mind flashed to Dabi, grinning sadistically as his blue flames encased his left side—

Not now. White, not now ***p̃l̃ẽ̃ãs̃ẽ̃*** *—*

He could hear Endeavor speaking but could not decipher the words amid the roar of burning flames in his ears. Endeavor shook him again and his head smashed into the tree. Wood chips and splinters stuck in his hair and his scalp stung. Endeavor pressed his forearm across Hawks's throat, leaning so close he could feel the heat from his flaming beard.

"—*tell me* who told you!" Endeavor demanded.

His hands and arm were too hot and Hawks's throat burned. When Hawks remained silent, Endeavor growled, reared back, and slapped him across the face— *just like Mom*. Hawks crumpled to the ground and Endeavor pinned him, a burning hand clasping his flammable wings.

Fearful clarity— icy and sharp— gripped Hawks and his mind shifted gears.

He went limp but kept his mouth *shut* because he would not betray his informant no matter how badly he was tortured. He would keep them safe until his last breath, just like the Commission taught him to if he was ever in the hands of the enemy—

"You call yourself a Hero yet you're giving up? How pathetic. If you don't pull yourself together ***right now*** *I'm taking control again."*

Hawks *remembered*.

Fear became unadulterated terror. Hawks knew this trick. He'd been the recipient of it too many times to count. No matter what he did or did not do, he would face punishment. If he fought Kaetsu like his handler demanded, he would get in trouble for resisting. If he screamed for help, no one would come. If he did not fight then Kaetsu would—

No. Any other punishment was preferable.

There was no choice.

Hawks struggled, elbowing Kaestu in the stomach and throwing him off him with a flare of his wings. He scrambled to his feet and faltered in confusion as he realized he was outside and not in one of the training facilities. Where was he? Was this a new test? That bewilderment cost him as Kaetsu tackled him again.

Except it was not Kaetsu. It was *Endeavor*. Why was *Endeavor* attacking him? Had Hawks been bad? Hawks didn't mean to be bad. He promised he would stop being bad. Just punish him here. Please don't tell Kaetsu he'd been bad again. Please, he'd do *anything*—

Hawks's consciousness *jolted* and he was no longer in control.

He screamed but could not use his mouth to do it, leaving him floundering in a black void as his body kicked Endeavor away from him.

Near-hysterical apologies ran through his mind and he slowly recognized Silver's harried tone. It was *Silver* controlling his body.

Hawks's terror weakened and he snapped back into control. He hastily backed away from Endeavor, scrambling along the ground like a helpless civilian. Endeavor— who looked angrier than he'd ever seen him before— advanced on him, fists ablaze. The other Hero honestly looked ready to *kill* him.

This wasn't right.

This couldn't be.

Endeavor was pushy and abusive to his family and tended to shove Hawks around to teach him respect but not to this extent. He would not attack Hawks like he was a Nomu that needed to be beaten into submission and put out of its misery.

Yet here they were, being silenced, just like White feared—

"Leave him *alone*!"

A small, hooded figure crashed into Endeavor, shoving him away. Hawks heard the male but young voice, lingering somewhere in the midst of puberty, and was horrified to realize a *teenager* had stepped between him and Endeavor.

Logically, the slim, short teenager should not have been able to shove the large, muscled Endeavor away. 'Logic' did not account for Quirks. Hawks wondered what kind the thin boy had that he could shove Endeavor away with the force of a charging bull.

As he was forced back, Endeavor's shocked reaction almost matched Hawks's own. The kid stayed between the two Heroes, stance firm and unshakable, and Hawks realized he had been trained in combat at the very least. *Shit*, it wasn't one of the UA kids, was it?

Please don't get hurt for me, was Hawks's first thought.

The boy had been wise to keep his hood up but his attempt at hiding his identity was lackluster at best. Hawks could not see his face, but Endeavor could. The Flame Hero's skin

turned bone white. Before he could speak, the boy ran, vanishing into the woods. Endeavor immediately took off after him.

Hawks made to rise but his shaking legs gave out, leaving him on the ground— trembling and emotional and *useless*— when someone needed him. He gingerly reached up and touched his throat, fingers icy cold against the burnt skin. Blood dripped from his split lip, his cheek felt puffy—as did his eye— and he could only pray it did not look as bad as it felt.

"*What the **hell** just happened?"* Orange demanded.

"*Endeavor went nuts."* Yellow said shakily.

"*I predicted his reaction would be violent, but not **that** violent*." Green said, audibly disturbed.

"*Are you okay, Gold?"* Red asked frantically. *"May I use some feathers for bandages and a salve?"*

Hawks did not answer her. He slowly wiped a drop of blood from his split lip as his other hand clasped at his burnt throat.

Now that Endeavor was away from him, he could calm down.

More importantly, he could *think*.

Endeavor wouldn't do this.

"Yes he would." Orange snarled.

***No.** Not like this. He wouldn't confront me in a public place where anyone could walk by and see, and leave me with obvious injuries. He would have dragged me somewhere private before trying to pressure me into keeping my mouth shut.* Hawks's heartbeat sped up. *White, were you afraid he would become violent?*

"...Yes." White admitted.

Hawks forgot how to breathe. ***He's here**.*

His gaze raked over the surrounding area, searching frantically for anyone between the trees. He jumped as a large figure appeared among them but it was Endeavor. The other Hero stormed up to him and grasped his arm.

"You will keep this to yourself." he hissed.

Any lingering fear Hawks had was stomped out.

"Where's that child?" he demanded. "What did you do—?"

"He got away." Endeavor growled. He looked too furious for it to be a lie. "And that was no child. Something else took that form."

Hawks's heart crawled into his throat. *Toga. But why would she help me?*

"*She wouldn't."* Green said instantly. *"It couldn't be Toga. That kid was too calm. He ignored your blood completely."*

Endeavor grasped Hawks's shoulder and he stiffened, preparing himself for a fight. Endeavor did not shake or try to burn him, but his hand was too hot, passing on his warning.

"You will *not* speak of this to anyone." Endeavor commanded again.

Hawks wondered how Endeavor could think he'd keep silent about his home life. He wondered how his former Hero could think leaving implied threats towards another Hero was perfectly acceptable. Still, Hawks purposely dropped his gaze as if in submission.

"Yes, sir."

Endeavor's gaze grew colder. He turned around without another word and walked away. Hawks watched him go and swallowed a frustrated scream.

If it were most other Heroes, Hawks would be able to definitively say Kaetsu was influencing their behavior and bringing his— No, not his.— bringing *White's* fear of a violent and disbelieving reaction to life. But Endeavor was not other Heroes.

Did he always hate me this much?

"*No."* Green claimed.

"*Yes."* Orange spat.

Hawks did not know who he believed. He silently followed Endeavor back towards the car. The police and Shatterpoint glanced their way and did a double take. Hawks knew they had spotted his disheveled appearance. It would be impossible not to.

Hawks smiled disarmingly and scratched at his cheek, the very image of sheepish. "I fell into a bush."

The two police officers relaxed and chuckled. Of course they did. Endeavor and Hawks were Heroes. Endeavor would never attack a fellow Hero, and
the *wonderful* and *truthful* and *justified* Heroes would have said something if they ran into a Villain.

Hawks wondered how officers of the law could be so blind.

Shatterpoint did not relax. He did not laugh. He hurried over to Hawks and carefully brushed some hair out of his face. Their eyes locked and Hawks's smile faltered when he realized Shatterpoint was not fooled by his excuse. Not at all.

"Why did you leave my side?" Shatterpoint demanded.

He wasn't angry. He was *scared*.

Purple realized what happened at the same time as Hawks.

"What kind of Quirk does this Kaetsu guy have?" he breathed.

Despite the voice's alarm, Hawks could hardly dare to hope. *You believe me about Kaetsu being here and influencing Endeavor?*

Purple shifted uncomfortably. *"I… don't know."*

Hawks forced his hurt deep inside where even he could hardly feel it.

As he followed Shatterpoint and Endeavor back to the car, he wondered how he could hide the marks from Miruko and Mockingjay.

XXXXXXX

I am a klutz and tripped.

No, too cliche.

I fell down stairs.

Still too cliche.

I flew into a window.

*Okay, I **know** I have some bird brain moments but I never do that. Plus that wouldn't explain the hand marks… self-directed stress grip, maybe? Though why I would grab my own throat is beyond me… Also the marks are too big. Shoot. What do you think?*

Silence met Hawks's question. He did not press the voices for a response. Instead he headed to the bathroom and searched it for the fourth time since returning to his office, refusing to admit he was upset when he failed to find his stash of cosmetics. That left his injuries fully exposed, only hidden by his clothes. And unless he decided to put on a full mask, Mockingjay would notice when she came back.

He did not want to see her reaction to his injuries.

He did not want to have to answer her questions about where they came from.

Hawks reluctantly returned to his desk, glancing nervously towards his office door, and called his receptionist to tell her to tell him if Mockingjay showed up. She saw nothing odd about the request and cheerfully agreed. Hawks relaxed and gave the voices a few more minutes to gather their thoughts, absently going through reports as he did so until he realized they weren't going to answer.

Hello? I could use some input at any time.

"Why?" Orange asked sourly. *"Why should we help you hide that Endeavor hurt you again?"*

Hawks gritted his teeth. *Because he was being influenced.*

"Right." White said skeptically. *"He was **completely** influenced by Kaetsu's Quirk to attack you after you revealed you know he's an abusive, shitty father."*

"*Language."* Silver said but there was no energy behind the admonishment.

"Are you sure you aren't just making excuses for Endeavor again?" Purple asked bluntly.

Hawks froze. His skin drained of color. *I'm sor—*

*"**Purple!**"* Silver snapped, interrupting him. *"How could you ask that?"*

Because it might be true, Hawks thought for him. A hollow feeling spread throughout his body, leaving numbness behind. *How can I trust my own claims of Quirk usage when I barely know Kaetsu's limits myself?*

"I'm not saying I don't believe you." Purple backtracked hastily. *"I'm just saying we shouldn't jump to conclusions."*

"It would help if we knew what Kaetsu could do." Yellow mentioned.

Hawks huddled in his jacket and tucked his chin. *You're right. His involvement is impairing my judgment. I'm sorry.*

"*Please stop apologizing."* White said wearily.

Hawks understood his bone-deep exhaustion. He wanted nothing more than to lay down and not get up again, because despite his earlier claims, he was inching closer to being absolutely *done* with everything.

"*You're upset we don't believe you."* Green noted.

How'd you figure that out, genius? Hawks asked with less fire and more pitiful misery than he intended.

"*We don't know what happened with Kaetsu."* Green began carefully as his *'because you won't tell us'* went unsaid. *"But it's effected you… badly. You've been a bit… whiplashy —"* Hawks knew he meant 'unstable.' *"— in your moods since you defied the Commission."*

I'm not dealing, Hawks admitted. His skin felt cold and he recognized the signs of an incoming anxiety attack. *I'm **not** dealing. Endeavor, the Commission, Rumi, the Meta Liberation Army and the League, Eri, UA, our Quirks, **Kaetsu**… Mostly Kaetsu.* Hawks laid his head down on the desktop, shoulders shaking, but did not cry. He *did not* cry. *It's **too much**.*

"Okay." Green said calmly though he sounded close to tears himself. *"Do you want to talk to Mockingjay about it? Or Rumi?"*

A chill went up Hawks's spine at the thought. *I won't be able to stop them if I tell them all of it. I won't let them become Villains for my sake.*

"*It's that bad?"* Pink whispered.

Hawks nodded.

"Gold, please." Green begged. *"We need to know so we can help."*

Hawks knew that. He understood that by keeping it to himself, he was just being a hypocrite and putting them all in greater danger. They needed to understand why hearing Kaetsu's name made him shake, why his Quirk scared him so badly, and why he believed Kaetsu had some hand in today's events.

It was selfish of him to continue to keep them in the dark when their own trauma was so exposed to him.

I need to talk to Toshinori.

"*That may not be a good idea."* Green said instantly.

"*Don't shove us away **again**!"* Orange snapped at the same time.

Hawks wilted. *I'm not. I j-just…* His shoulder ached. *Why can't I talk to Toshinori? I promise I'll let you listen.*

His voice sounded more fragile than he wanted to admit.

Green instantly backtracked. *"Gold, you don't have to—"*

I do. Hawks's shoulder *ached*. Ghostly pain radiated from it, making his chest prickle. *I need to talk to someone or I think I'm going to do something stupid.*

"*Do it."* Orange said instantly.

Both he and Hawks would deny there was unease in his voice.

Hawks scrolled to Toshinori's number. He stared at it, and despite Green's whispers that it was actually okay to call Toshinori, his paranoia got the best of him— Why would Green say it was a bad idea?— and he could not bear to.

Instead he scrolled upward and pressed call. It only rang once before it was picked up.

"*Hello, Hawks."* Tensei Iida's cheerful voice failed to calm Hawks down. *"How are you—"*

"Are you busy?" Hawks whispered.

"No." Tensei said instantly. *"What do you need?"*

Hawks licked his dry lips. "Can I come over? Now?"

"Of course. I'm at my place. Not the family home." He rattled off the address and Hawks heard the jangle of keys. *"Do you need a ride?"*

"No. I can fly. See you soon."

Hawks hung up before Tensei could ask any more questions. He stood in a stunned stupor for a moment as he realized what he had done. The walls of his office were too close. They closed in, wavering in front of his eyes as his vision slid, and his breath came in sharp pants.

He needed air.

The walls were too close.

They were suffocating him.

He *needed air*.

He jumped right out of his office window.

He heard someone yell at him to stop but he did not turn back. He immediately got a call from Mockingjay but did not answer. Instead he sent a text saying he was going to Tensei's and turned off his phone and communicator.

Even as everything blurred around Hawks, his flight speed felt agonizingly uncoordinated and slow, with every beat of his wings reverberating through his shivering body and making it ache. He did not stop, consumed by the terrified urge to get away get away *get away before they trap you—*

Eventually the sound of muffled shouting reached his static-filled ears and he realized it was Silver.

"*Hawks! Where are you going? Tensei's house isn't this way."*

Hawks blinked in confusion and glanced down at the unfamiliar city landscape below him. What was this? Where was he? How far had he flown? Had he drifted mid-flight?

Muddled, panic-tinged confusion tore through him and he wrapped his arms around his torso, taking a shuddering breath as he struggled to orient himself.

"*We headed east."* Red helpfully told him before he could apologize.

R-Right. Thanks.

He turned around and flew in the correct direction.

The rest of the flight to Tensei's home was much calmer than he expected. It wasn't that he thought he would be shot out of the sky, but the more distance he put between himself and Fukuoka— None of the voices commented about how he'd somehow lost track of his location so close to home.— the more his panic faded and his head cleared. He'd be happier about if he were ignorant to how it was not due to a healthy mindset. Quite the opposite, actually.

The serenity Hawks felt was that of a man headed to his death because he knew nothing would be the same after this.

He could only hope Tensei would not b̂l̀á́m̀ę̌— be too disgusted with him.

Of all the places for Tensei Iida to live, a blue house in an isolated wooden area was not on the list. It was built in a Western style more than traditional Japenese, with a literal white picket fence along the front yard. The standalone home was tiny compared to the Yaoyorozu residence or End— the Todo— the Iida Family estate, but still much bigger than Hawks expected. As he landed outside, Hawks took some comfort that it was unlikely the news would be able to follow him here.

Tensei was waiting on the front porch, once hand laid on the golden knob of his white door. Silver's joy at seeing his brother again was muffled and subdued.

His face was drawn, making him appear decades older than he was. "Hawks? You're hurt."

Hawks blinked rapidly. "I—" His shoulders hunched and he glanced around self-consciously.

Tensei stepped aside. "Come right in."

He ushered Hawks inside and shut the door behind them.

The inside of the house was as nice as the outside, with more furniture and items than Hawks had ever owned in his life. The wall above the couch had a huge frame filled with photographs, and among them Hawks spotted pictures of Tensei's family and a group shot of the students of Class 1-A.

He also saw one of Endeavor, scowling at the camera as an obliviously-grinning All Might slung an arm across his shoulders.

Hawks's legs turned into a newborn foal's and he barely made it to the couch before collapsing. Tensei knelt in front of him and gently brushed his hair away from his face. Hawks knew he saw the burns and darkening bruises there.

"What happened?"

Hawks focused on Tensei's nose so he could pretend to be looking into his eyes. He opened his mouth and said—

"Endeavor."

The voices' alarm pierced Hawks and he clapped a hand over his mouth.

"I didn't— *Nothing happened*. I meant to say noth—" Shame doused Hawks like he'd been thrown into a bar of ice water and he began to shake. "I'm so sorry."

Tensei's face was white. "Hawks, what do you mean *Endeavor* did this to you?"

Hawks flinched. "I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?" Now Tensei sounded close to tears himself.

Hawks should say something comforting but he was caught in a whirlpool, unable to escape. "I'm sorry."

Tensei looked panicked now. He was speaking but Hawks barely noticed.

"I'm *sorry*."

The voices finally realized who he was apologizing to. White shifted and Hawks flinched, expecting anger and condemnation because he'd stupidly blabbed what they had worked so hard to keep secret. Instead a surprisingly warm presence brushed his mind.

"You can tell him. We shouldn't have forced you to keep this to yourself."

Hawks took a shuddering breath and slowly reached up to pull down his collar, exposing the burns on his throat. Tensei's mouth moved wordlessly and his gaunt face seemed to grow greyer as he put the pieces together.

Hawks swallowed roughly. "Could you take pictures? For evidence?"

Tensei nodded mutely. He turned and stumbled out of the room like a drunken man, nearly bumping into the wall on the way out. He hit the same wall on the way back and it cracked loudly. Hawks's already fried nerves went into overdrive and he jumped behind the couch for cover before registering where the sound had come from.

Tensei halted on the other side of the couch and did not approach. "Hawks?"

"I'm fine. Sorry." he whispered.

Tensei set the camera down. Hawks's gaze followed it like it was a live bomb that was ready to go off.

"Do you want to talk to a friend or a Pro Hero?" Tensei asked seriously.

Hawks's brain went foggy. He heard muffled alarm from the voices but could not find it within himself to be bothered by it.

"We should compile evidence and I will give my report." he said tonelessly.

"Hawks." Warm— not burning— hands gripped his. Tensei's gentle blue eyes— so different than Endeavor's icy blue— met his. "What do *you* want?"

Hawks forced his voice to work. "Friend."

"Okay." Tensei breathed. Hawks felt a quivering sensation and looked down to see the Pro Hero's hands were trembling. "What happened?"

Hawks should lie. He should fudge the truth to keep Tensei from finding it out. He should downplay his injuries, and joke about falling into a burning bush or something, because if

Tensei found out, other Heroes would not be far behind.

Hawks was so tired of lying.

"I figured out that Endeavor abused his family a while ago. Today I got angry and confronted him like an *idiot* instead of doing the smart thing and waiting for the evidence to be put together." Hawks loathed to admit his voice cracked. "Endeavor threatened me and attacked me. He— He *might* have been under the influence of a Quirk but at least some of it was him alone. He burned me and grabbed my wings and kept demanding I tell him who spilled—" He jolted upright and nearly shoved Tensei away from him in his panic to rise. "What if he goes home and thinks *Shoto* said something?"

Tensei already had his phone out. He sent a quick text and put it away. "I told Tenya to invite Shoto home after class."

Hawks relaxed. "Thank you." He realized what Tensei had said and felt his eyes widen. "You're… acting on what I said?"

"Yes." Tensei said simply.

The words failed to make sense to Hawks. "You *believe* me?"

"Yes."

Hawks felt his forehead crinkle. "But I didn't give you evidence." His tone came out rather childish— small, confused, and *naive*— and his cheeks reddened with shame.

"Hawks..." Tensei's voice teetered somewhere between grief and anger, ready to fall into one emotion or the other. "Your word and injuries are enough evidence."

Hawks touched his burnt throat. It closed up and he lowered his head, eyes burning. "It might not have been his fault," he felt the need to say, despite the possibility that he was simply defending Endeavor again. "He might have been under the influence of a Quirk. I… don't know if he was. But he *might* have. So— So I have to give him the benefit of the doubt, r-right?" He rubbed at his eyes. "I'm *not* going to cry about *him*."

"You looked up to him. You thought he was a good man." This time it was Tensei's voice that cracked as his composure slipped.

Hawks wondered if it was hitting him now, what Endeavor's actions meant for the Todorokis and Hero Society as a whole.

"I keep defending him." Hawks admitted, voice choked with guilt. "And I don't know if it's because I genuinely think he's not completely bad and thus deserves a chance, or if I'm making excuses for him. I… I'm so *lost*. I feel like I don't know my own head. Sometimes it feels like I'm going *crazy*. I don't know what's *real*. What *are* my feelings?" His vision blurred but he did not cry. "I can't trust my own judgment. I can't trust my own thoughts and memories anymore. I don't know if I *ever* could."

"What do you mean?"

Tensei looked so *concerned*. So *genuinely* supportive.

Would that look be replaced by revulsion when Hawks told him the truth?

Hawks did not want to find out, but he had promised the voices he'd tell them what their enemy could do.

So he did.

"When I was sixteen years old, I pushed the Commission too far." Hawks could not bear to look at Tensei's face and dropped his gaze to the floor. "My greatest fear was losing the last bit of control I had left in my life, so a handler of mine— Kaetsu— used his Fearful Fantasy Quirk to control me completely for almost a year."

Pediophobia

Chapter Notes

> WARNING: This chapter contains physical, verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse, gaslighting, misgendering, dissociation, denial, conditioning, self-blame, victim blaming, threats of sexual assault, allusions and non-graphic descriptions of non-consensual touching/kissing/assault, mention of vomiting and starvation (no descriptions), suicidal ideation, and a suicide attempt. Nothing is graphically described in detail but read at your discretion. This is your warning.

I can do this.

I can do this.

I can do this.

Hawks checked his reflection in the mirror for what must be the thousandth time and reached up, fiddling with his hair. It refused to lay flat, sticking up in bird-like tufts, and he scowled at his stupid animal traits. The sixteen year-old quickly covered the glower with a cheerful smile. Heroes did not scowl, after all. They always smiled no matter how annoyed they felt. Still, smiling hurt a little because of the bruises on his face. Pathfinder had worked him hard in training and the right side of his face was more black and blue than skin-colored at the moment. He'd have to cover them up before he met with the Commission President.

Hawks did just that and deftly concealed the marks with cosmetics. He had tons of practice and was proud to say he could apply such cosmetics in a few minutes. Particularly from when he had to practice modeling. Ugh, he hate— *Heroes do not 'hate.'*— disliked modeling *so much*. It did not leave him so exhausted he could barely find the energy to crawl into bed, but it made him antsy in ways other types of training did not. He hated having to sit still as he let his handlers prod and move him into different poses while shoving him into outfits that forced him to cover injuries with make up.

At least during training he could move on his own. When he was modeling, he was supposed to be a glorified dress up doll. The way some of his handlers looked at him during these sessions did not make him feel any more at ease. He had to get used to their stares though. Hawks knew the best Pro Heroes had to be beautiful eye candy for the public— complete with pinups and calendars filled with photos— but that did not mean he had to like it.

In fact, once he learned to ignore the people around him the whole thing became rather tedious. Even looking at the pictures he was given that were filled with scantily-clad Heroes was simply research on how to tip his head a certain way and smirk prettily. One of his handlers had mocked him for being a hormonal teenager and when Hawks told him he wasn't,

he'd gotten a slap and a stern warning not to lie. Hawks had not been able to tell whether the handler was angry at the unwanted comment or annoyed that Hawks wasn't interested in 'normal teenager things', so he'd kept his lack of interest to himself since then.

It was just a minor example of how the Commission could be so *confusing* sometimes. Hawks could not always predict how they wanted him to act. He was supposed to act 'like a Hero' and 'better than a lazy brat' but what did that mean exactly? He dare not ask. Heroes were supposed to figure out things on their own, and turning to others for answers was simply childish and a show of incompetence.

Hawks finished covering his face and considered his arms and the purple marks there but decided his jacket would cover them. His handlers had wanted his costume to show more skin or at least be tighter, but Hawks liked the comfort of his jacket and pants. Plus, it got cold when he flew. They'd actually *listened* to him when he said that and took his word into account when creating his costume. Though instead of having a t-shirt with a back that went right under his wings like he requested, they made it a halter top that went much lower, exposing his back almost completely. Hawks did not understand why—really, a t-shirt would have been fine— but it left plenty of room for his wings so that was good.

But still, they *listened* to his input. At least a little.

Hawks still could not believe it, but it gave him hope. Now that he was sixteen— two years from becoming an official Pro Hero— maybe the Commission would relax their grip on him. He knew they were so strict with his upbringing because he needed to be a good Hero— and he was grateful to them for giving him that opportunity, really he was— but now that he was older, maybe he could stretch his wings a little. The Commission could not watch over him forever, right? They trained him until it was time to let him loose. That's how it worked. At least, that's what Hawks hoped would happen.

He could not wait to turn eighteen. In just two more years, he would be an official Pro Hero. He would go outside the Commission's lonely walls and work with other Heroes to save the day.

Maybe… Maybe a couple would like to work together *often*?

Hawks knew Heroes were supposed to work alone— like All Might— but sometimes they worked in teams, too. Hawks hoped he made a good first impression to any potential teammates. If he proved he was useful, maybe another Hero— maybe even his idol, Endeavor—would keep him around. Just for a little bit. They did not have to stay forever. Hawks was not needy. Heroes did not need frien— teammates.

He knew better than to mention all that to the Commission. Heroes worked alone. They relied on their own strength. Just because Hawks's Quirk was pathetic for combat situations— unlike All Might's— did not mean he needed to drag others down. But still, a temporary Hero teammate would be nice.

But that was not what Hawks wanted to discuss with the Commission today.

The sixteen year-old made sure his costume was perfectly placed, smoothing the fabric and checking his gloves again. No stains, no holes, not a wrinkle or speck of grime. He would be a Hero soon and Heroes had to look their best at all times.

Hawks moved away from the mirror and checked his notes one more time before shoving them into his dresser. Heroes had to give speeches all the time, so he would need to rely on memory for his presentation. He went over the numbers over and over again, knowing one wrong decimal would be pinpointed and used to rip everything else apart.

Hawks checked the time and took a deep breath. *I can do this.*

He walked out his door and straight into Amplifier. Hawks stilled and put on a blank expression, swallowing the relieved sigh that wanted to escape when he did not feel any pain. Heroes did not gasp or scream when they felt pain, something Hawks had been slow to learn. That was why the President had Amplifier appear for unscheduled sessions. If Hawks grimaced from an unexpected jolt, what good would he be when a Villain punched him?

Hawks's poker face must have been good enough because Amplifier did not use his Quirk. Instead the masked man seemed to take in Hawks's appearance.

"You do not have maneuverability testing today." Amplifier noted.

"No, sir." Hawks said, giving no more information than was asked.

Amplifier cupped Hawks's cheek with a large, cold hand. "What are you doing today?"

Hawks did not reply. Amplifier was not privy to his reason for meeting with the Commission board today. He knew it and Amplifier knew it. But that was the test. If Hawks could not be trusted to keep this to himself, what use was he?

A sharp, persistent pain shot through Hawks's cheek and down his neck but he did not flinch, remaining silent and impassive as Amplifier kept his Quirk activated. The stabbing sensation became a burning one but Hawks did not even exhale shakily. He was used to this by now, so he held fast and waited for Amplifier to eventually stop.

It took several minutes, but Amplifier released him.

"Not even a flinch. Well done, kid."

Hawks beamed at the praise.

"Heroes do not show pride."

Amplifier sounded bored rather than irritated but Hawks still repressed a wince, forcing his wings not to droop. "Yes, sir."

Amplifier grunted and clapped him on the shoulder— it felt like a knife went straight through him— before leaving. Hawks cautiously continued on his way, but his interrogation-resistance trainer did not come back to unexpectedly grab him again. Instead another handler emerged like a specter and merely followed him down the hall.

Norito Kaetsu was a handler that always lingered in the background. Despite his acid green eyes, shocking white hair, tall stature and muscular build, he was rather unremarkable in that he... didn't do much. He was there when Hawks went to Amplifier's training sessions, there when he met with the Commission board, there when he practiced his acting and manipulation skills, there when he modeled. Hawks knew Kaetsu was a sniper in the field, but in HQ he must be a supervisor or something because he never taught Hawks how to shoot or fight like him. Instead he was just… there. Observing.

Hawks did not try to speak to Kaetsu, and he in turn did not speak to Hawks. Instead he followed Hawks right to the President's office, watching as he always did.

Hawks respectfully knocked and, upon receiving permission, entered. The President of the Hero Commission sat at her clean, barren desk, her fingers neatly folded together on top of it.

"You're late." she said.

Hawks hid a wince and bowed sharply. "I apologize, ma'am. I met Amplifier in the hallway and—"

"There is no excuse for tardiness." she interrupted coldly. "If Heroes are late, it means a loss of life."

Hawks's stomach twisted with guilt. "I'm sorry, ma'am."

"Hmph." The President's sharp eyes pinned him in place. "I put time aside in my schedule for you, and you are already wasting it."

"Of course." Hawks said quickly, careful not to stumble over his words. "I'll begin right now."

She inclined her head in agreement and Hawks tried not breathe a sigh of relief. He focused on her nose so he could pretend to be looking her in the eyes and cleared his throat.

"Over the past few months, I have been researching Heroes and their methods for dealing with high crime rates." Hawks spoke confidently like the Commission taught him, showing none of his nerves. At least, he hoped so. "While arrests are the most common method, research shows a steady decline in percentages of crimes in cities patrolled by certain Heroes."

Hawks did not give any names. Not yet. The Commission did not like some Heroes because of their arrogance— they thought they knew better than the *Commission*— and if Hawks gave the wrong one as an example, his entire proposal would be ignored.

"They work to reduce crime in impoverished and neglected areas through assistance programs which helped people in those areas find honest work. They also help provide affordable housing there, and help bring economic growth to those areas too. This type of assistance is proven to help decrease the number of survival-motivated Villains in those areas."

Hawks did not mention how he'd likely be one of those desperate Villains if not for the Commission, and that was if he even made it to his teenaged years. Hawks was lucky enough to have a roof over his head and enough food to not go hungry most of the time. The exceptions were when he got in trouble or when his old modeling coach insisted he needed to be thinner so she shrank his portion sizes. The Commission President herself had put a stop to that when she figured out starving was what hindered his performance and that handler was fired immediately.

The Commission President could be harsh, but she was reasonable. Hawks knew everything she did was to make him the best Hero he could be. He wanted to give back, and coming up with ways to expand that generosity to others on his own seemed like a great investment.

Hawks risked a glance at the President.

She did not look annoyed.

Did… Did that mean she was listening?

Hawks squashed his hopes before they could grow and kept speaking. "Another route to be considered is to change Japan's Quirk Therapy industry. Some people's Quirks compel them to perform certain acts to activate their Quirks, and this can make them dangerous. Thus, they are sent to Quirk Therapy in order to learn how to suppress those urges. However, statistics show that suppression only makes the compulsion worse in nine out of every ten cases."

Hawks desperately hoped the statistics he remembered were correct. He did not let his uncertainty show.

"I'd like to implement a 'Quirk Assistance' program like those found in other countries. It places those with Quirk-based compulsions in an environment that allows them to follow those compulsions but in controlled, monitored ways. Through this method, they learn to control these compulsions."

The President still said nothing. Hawks hoped that was a good sign.

"For example, an American man had a Quirk called 'Bad Luck Charm' which allowed him to target those around him and give them bad luck. Normally it was harmless things like making them drop food down themselves. However, this Quirk compelled the man to tag random people with bad luck, which of course was illegal. So he repressed his compulsion. However, if he did not tag anyone, he would become more and more aggressive and agitated until his Quirk exploded out of him and caused bad luck to *everyone* around him in a fifty meter radius. One of these outbursts caused a twenty-car pileup, though thankfully no one died. Through a Quirk Assistance group, the man learned to control his compulsion and whittle it down to manageable levels. Before receiving support, he had to tag one person a day or risk an outburst. After half a year, he only needed to tag one person a month. After two years, he did not need to tag anyone at all."

Hawks felt his back straighten but forced his wings not to extend. "A Hero's duty is to stop Villains that use their Quirks for crimes, but that goal does little to prevent those Villains from *becoming* criminals. The world has already adapted so much in order to allow Quirks to

fit into society, and evidence shows that further adaptation can only benefit both the individual and the public as a whole. Decreasing people's need to become Villains through unlucky circumstance or their Quirks being considered dangerous would—"

BANG!

The President's hands came down on the top of the desk with a thunderous crash, silencing Hawks. The neutral pleasantry was gone from her face, replaced by a furious expression.

"'Need'? They '*need*' to become Villains?"

Hawks recognized that tone. He forced his hands not to shake. "U-Um. These programs would help to stop them from becoming Villains in the first place. Many just become Villains because they don't— feel like they don't have a choice, or because they can't control their compulsions. It's like blaming someone for accidentally kicking a person when their knee jerk reflex is activated. Heroes are supposed to save and help, and minimizing the need for them to become Villains to feel accepted or survive would reduce the need for arrests, and in turn reduce the strain on Heroes to—"

"Are you truly implying Heroes should *let Villains go* in order to *lessen your workload?*" the President said icily.

Hawks repressed a flinch. "I-I never said that."

He might as well have remained silent for all she listened.

"That's *enough*." she thundered. "Have you learned *nothing* from your training? Heroes do not make *excuses* for Villains."

Hawks did not protest that he hadn't meant to imply that either. He felt his wing feathers fluff up and mentally begged them to lay flat. The President hated it when he did that. It showed he was scared. Her cold glare became icier than the arctic.

"It seems you need a refresher on how good Heroes really act. Kaetsu."

Hawks's gaze snapped to the handler and he looked back, expression one of pure boredom.

"You've been a bad little Hero." he murmured, almost as if to himself. Acidic green eyes met frightened gold, and Hawks swore Kaetsu's lips twisted into a small, sadistic grin. "Let's fix that."

For a moment, Hawks had no idea anything had happened.

But then the feathers in his wings relaxed and his lips stretched into a heroic smile.

Hawks's body relaxed too and he settled into a generic, standby stance, like a soldier waiting for an order.

His *body* did that, not Hawks.

Because *he could not move his limbs*.

Even Hawks's eyes were beyond his control. They did not dart back and forth in a panic as he kept on smiling, his every muscle attached to invisible strings that were not his to control. Instead they softened, matching his heroic, good-natured grin.

Hawks's body blinked.

His chest moved as he breathed.

His feathers were flat, his wings not twitching the slightest bit.

He could not control any of it. His throat refused to even tighten in fear as inside his head, he screamed.

Hawks's body may as well be a coffin he was locked in.

In front of him, Kaetsu smiled serenely. "Your greatest fear is losing yourself and becoming a controlled puppet. How exquisite."

Hawks's world did not go black.

He wished it did.

Hawks smiled as he went through his daily training session with Pathfinder and Amplifier. He did not mean or want to but it was like someone had forced his lips into a grin before paralyzing him.

"Heroes always smile, even when in pain." Kaetsu reminded him as Pathfinder punched Hawks in the throat. The blow took his breath away but his expression remained unchanged.

"Heroes always win." Kaetsu told him as his body did not react fast enough and he was kicked to the floor.

"Heroes never lose." Kaetsu informed him as Pathfinder pinned his body to the ground.

A part of Hawks wanted to scream that it was Kaetsu's fault that he'd lost because he was the one using Hawks like a marionette. He recoiled from such a notion because he could not afford to be childish and blame others for his screw ups. Kaetsu was right, and Hawks was the failure for not realizing it.

His body attempted to throw Pathfinder off him. Instead she successfully restrained him, twisting his arm behind his back. Hawks's smiling face was pressed into the concrete and no matter how his body struggled, he could not break free. His position gave him a clear view of Amplifier, who stood near the wall with his arms crossed. His disappointment was clear, but Hawks could not turn his head away so he did not have to see it.

"Could you make him stop smiling?" Amplifier muttered to Kaetsu. "It's creepy."

Kaetsu did not appear to hear him. He looked between Pathfinder and Hawks and, as Hawks continued to fail to break free, he sighed.

"Break it." he ordered in a tone more often used for asking about the weather.

Pathfinder inclined her head.

Then she snapped Hawks's arm.

Hawks did not scream, but tears welled up in his eyes. He heard Kaetsu sigh again, and his handler leaned over him, frowning with tired disappointment.

"Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face." Kaetsu told Hawks again. "You are a *Hero*. You *provide* comfort. You do *not* need it."

He proceeded to stomp on Hawks's broken arm.

Hawks kept smiling as tears of pain pooled in his eyes.

He could not utter a sound.

In the subsequent weeks, Kaetsu followed him everywhere like a hulking nanny watched an unruly child. He oversaw Hawks's training of every type, and he never stopped staring as he *always* watched Hawks with a serene smile on his face.

But every so often, his expression would twist.

His smile would widen, his acid green eyes glinting with a mad light, and he'd stare at Hawks like a ravenous wolf looked at bloody meat.

It was creepy.

Since Kaetsu always watched him, Hawks made a habit of keeping boxers and his costume's halter top on as much as he could. Heroes were not shy, and Hawks was used to modeling, but something about Kaetsu's unrelenting stare *unnerved* him. Even though he was not ordered to, Hawks always turned away and covered himself with his wings whenever he needed to fully get changed. He had to, because Kaetsu was with him everywhere except the bathroom. He was even given a bed in Hawks's room.

"I have to remain close for my Quirk to remain effective." he claimed.

Hawks knew he was a liar.

He just wanted to watch Hawks to fall and burn.

Any remaining limits to Hawks training were removed. Any reasonable stopping points or restraint were revoked. Instead every day was a continuous stream of torment, with Hawks's body acting as the vessel while Kaetsu became the puppeteer.

But even his control could not rid Hawks of his body's natural reservations and weaknesses.

And as Hawks failed again and again, Kaetsu's serene smile faded and he grew angrier.

"You missed that target by half an inch." Kaetsu insisted, speaking more words in a few weeks than Hawks had heard from him in all the years he had been with the Commission. "Do it again."

"Do it again."

"Do it *again*."

"*Again*."

"Why are you stopping? You still have blood feathers left. Use them."

"Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I haven't noticed you've been missing the vitals? Are you still so stupid you still want to help Villains? Do you still have your selfish ideas to 'save' them? Villains are the enemy of Society. Good Heroes do not grant an enemy mercy. So hit. *The target.*"

"A perfect head-shot. So you *can* learn."

"Are you truly so *lazy* that you think you can sleep during training? I know you didn't pass out from blood loss. Humans can still fight if they've lost an arm. A few missing feathers is barely an inconvenience."

"Your speed has slowed by .03%. I know you're faster than this. *Stop* being lazy. Every second you waste is another life lost, and those losses are on *your head*."

"Are you tired, *Angel*? Too bad. Heroes do not need rest."

"Get up. You're staying in the air for the next thirty-two hours."

"Stop fishing for sympathy by acting pathetic."

"You're twenty years too young to try to manipulate me into sympathizing with you, child."

"Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face. You are a *Hero*. You *provide* comfort. You do *not* need it."

"Do you think a Villain will care if you're tired? Do you think they'll show you pity if you act like a beaten dog?"

"Get *up*. There is still work to be done."

"You fell unconscious for ten hours. You will remain in the air for the next week."

Slap. A strike to the face. "Heroes do not flinch."

Thud. A fist to the throat. "Heroes *do not* flinch."

Crack. A broken collar bone. "Why didn't you *dodge*? Are you that incompetent?"

"Keep your problems to yourself and your pain *off your face*. You are a *Hero*.
You *provide* comfort. *You do not need it.*"

"Does All Might waste his time on 'Villain assistance' programs?"

"Have you ever seen All Might cry? No. Because Heroes *do not cry*."

"If All Might were in your position, do you think he would complain?"

"Does All Might flinch when a Villain attacks him?"

"All Might makes sacrifices every day for the good of Hero Society. He is the embodiment of selflessness. Why do you disgrace the legacy of Heroes like this?"

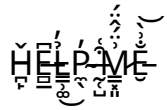
"Be grateful we're spending so much time on correcting your behavior. We could cut your head open and rip out your organs for study. We could break your mind and leave you an empty shell. We could slit your throat and leave your body in a ditch. *No one* would give a damn about a piece of trash like you. You'd be forgotten about in a year."

"Stop. *Flinching.*"

Despite Hawks being the passive observer in his own body, Kaetsu blamed him every time he failed.

He began to hit him too. A lot. A slap to the face, a vice-like grip on his arm, grasping his hair and shaking him like a misbehaving puppy, a shove into the wall head-first, sharp fingers grabbing and yanking out handfuls of feathers from his wings.

No one objected if they saw because Hawks deserved it.



It had been three months since Hawks was first put under Kaetsu's control.

Rather than improve, he grew steadily worse in every department. His speed dropped, his wit faltered, he lost more spars than he won. He failed at simple tasks like aerial maneuvers, because although Kaetsu's Quirk forcibly guided him, his body was too exhausted to prevent him from crashing. Sleep was a rare luxury, bruises and cuts littered his skin, and a hollow look filled his golden eyes even as his plastic smile remained in place.

Hawks knew it was all his own fault, because Kaetsu's control was perfect. Hawks should be a perfect, good Hero, like he feared and the Commission wanted. He had stopped struggling and thinking unheroic things long ago, but his body still refused to do what the Commission commanded. Instead he weakened, becoming more and more pathetic in his displays.

So when Kaetsu brought him to the Commission President's office and released him from his Quirk, Hawks did not stand with pride like a good Hero should. Instead his knees buckled

and he crumpled to the floor. His sobs filled the desolate meeting room and he could not manage to muffle them.

The President stood over him, unsympathetic to his weeping. In fact, it only made her more disgusted.

"It seems you haven't learned anything from this experience." she sighed. "Why do you continue to waste our resources and time?"

Hawks tried to apologize but couldn't utter the words as they remained stuck in his throat. Instead childish hiccups tore themselves out of his aching throat. The President's nose wrinkled as if she were looking at disgusting trash she had found in the gutter, and gestured to Kaetsu.

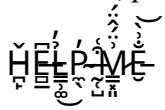
Terror burst in Hawks's chest and he found his voice.

"I'm sorry. *I'm sorry!* Please don't put me under again." he begged. "I'll be a good Hero. Please, I can do better!"

She sniffed. "Heroes don't beg."

Kaetsu smiled and stepped forward.

Hawks tried to back away— crawling on his hands and knees like the most cowardly of Villains— even though he knew it was futile. "No, *please*—"



Life went on.

Hawks's body was trained until it gave out and he inevitably collapsed.

Over and over and over again.

Kaetsu struck him for every mistake.

Over and over and over again.

Hawks smiled through insults and broken bones and bruises and cuts and pain.

Over and over and over again.

He listened to the Commission's lessons on real heroics and *tried* to show he was taking it to heart, but a doll could not show anything except the expression its master gave it.

Over.

And.

Over.

And.

Over.

As the months passed, Kaetsu began to change.

To an outsider, the stoic man seemed to become happier, laughing and smiling often as he walked through HQ with a bounce in his step.

Hawks knew better.

Kaetsu's smile was not that of a man who found happiness in life.

It was that of a man losing his grip on sanity.

Hawks knew many Quirks came with drawbacks if they were overused. Some were physical, and others mental. Kaetsu's Quirk seemed to fall into the latter category. The euphoria it gave him acted like a drug, bringing him unnatural joy that messed with his mental state. He did well at hiding it, so only Hawks noticed.

Or maybe everyone noticed but did not care.

After a particularly grueling week, Hawks had collapsed again. Most of his feathers had been torn out one by one to test how long he could keep to the air, and he'd eventually plummeted to the ground, knocking himself unconscious. He woke with his smile in place and Kaetsu watching.

Kaetsu was smiling as well. His smile was twitchy, like he had uncontrollable muscle spasms in his lips and jaw, and his eyes gleamed with a disturbing light.

Hawks could not show how unnerved he was by that expression. Heroes did not show unease, so he was not allowed to.

"Get changed." Kaetsu ordered.

Hawks's body obediently got up and he grabbed a pair of sweatpants and a shirt from his dresser. His jacket had bloodstains on it again, but he could not show his dismay at yet another failure. Heroes' costumes were their pride, and yet he'd dirtied his. Could he be any more incompetent?

Hawks smiled as his eyes burned but he did not cry. Heroes did not cry, as Kaetsu often reminded him.

He turned away from Kaetsu and removed his jacket, exposing the tattered remains of his wings. The feathers would regenerate, but for now, he barely had enough for them to be considered wings. Bits of bone were visible through the few remaining feathers, all of which were useless in combat. If he tried to attack an enemy with them, he may as well throw a cotton ball at their face.

Without his coat, his halter top— with its custom open back for his wings— did not provide much warmth. Hawks felt cold but did not shiver. Heroes did not show they were cold. A hot hand landed on his back, between his minuscule, useless wings and he obediently went still. He felt Kaetsu's equally hot breath tickle the back of his neck.

For a moment, his handler did not move, but then he gave Hawks a light push. Hawks stumbled forward but kept himself upright, much like a robot relying on its balancing programming. Kaetsu gave a childish giggle and shoved him again, a bit harder. Hawks did not fall.

The click of a switchblade was the only warning Hawks got before a knife was coming at his face.

His muscles remained lax and he kept smiling as the blade halted an inch from his eye. Kaetsu held it there for a moment and lowered it with a muffled snort.

"You're like a *toy!*" Kaetsu giggled. "You can't do *anything* without me." He laughed breathlessly like Hawks's helplessness was the funniest thing in the world. "I've never gotten to use my Quirk like this before! Your fear is so *invigorating*. I've never felt so *alive!*"

Hawks smiled at him and stood in place, a dependent Hero doll waiting for its next order. Kaetsu's laughing fit ended abruptly and he stepped in front of Hawks, leaning in. His acid green eyes almost appeared to be glowing in the near-darkness.

"What fears can I create inside you?" he murmured. "What are the limits? How much can I do before you break?"

Hawks could not answer. He kept smiling.

Acid green eyes scrutinized Hawks's grinning face and Kaetsu's expression softened, becoming almost gentle.

"You know, you're almost an adult now. You've grown so much…" Kaetsu murmured, almost to himself. "You're… *beautiful*. Like an angel." His hand trailed down Hawks's smiling face, firmly grasping his chin. "Shouldn't you have grown stubble by now?" He forcibly turned Hawks's head to inspect it from every angle, fingers caressing his smooth jaw thoughtfully. "You're too *pretty* to be a boy."

Hawks was not naive.

He was not so ignorant that he failed to notice the glint in Kaetsu's eyes.

He could not move away as his handler leaned close. He was frozen like a porcelain statue with a smile on his face. Kaetsu's breath smelled like blood. His arms slid around Hawks with deceptive gentleness, guiding him into his arms, and one hand grasped his hair, pulling it just enough to be painful as he held his head still. The edge of a knife kissed Hawks's throat and Kaetsu's nose pressed against the top of his head. He inhaled deeply.

"Your smell is too pretty to be a boy's, too. You smell like *fear*."

Hawks's body kept smiling. His heartbeat did not change despite the terror he felt. His body might as well not be his own. In that moment, he wished it wasn't.

Kaetsu chuckled unsteadily— like *he* was the one of the verge of shattering into pieces— and stepped back.

His fist swung and struck Hawks's temple.

The blow reverberated through Hawks and he crumpled to the floor. He did not try to get up or move. Instead he laid there like a useless rag doll, waiting for his owner to drag him around. Kaetsu grabbed his wing and yanked out a handful of small, downy feathers, fingers scraping on the exposed, bloody bone.

Hawks kept smiling as his eyes filled with tears of pain. Kaetsu let the feathers flutter uselessly to the ground and grabbed Hawks's arm, positioning his body so he laid flat on his stomach. Hawks remained limp and easily poseable, like good Heroes were supposed to be when modeling. Perhaps it was Kaetsu's Quirk, but he felt strangely detached from his body, even as Kaetsu climbed on top of him, pinning him down.

Hawks knew his frame was rather slight, but Kaetsu's weight felt like it was going to crush him. His handler nuzzled the crook of his neck and inhaled, eyes closing in rapture.

"So… *beautiful*."

Hawks's heartbeat did not change when Kaetsu grasped his throat with one hand, just tight enough that he struggled to breathe. His skin did not go clammy as his handler kissed the back of his neck. He had no reaction as Kaetsu's knife slid down his spine. Hawks did not scream, or tense, or fight, because control of his body remained out of his reach.

Hawks's forced smile vanished and tears trickled down his face, but his body refused to move.

"Don't cry, Angel." Kaetsu whispered in his ear. "I am a patient man. I can wait for you to turn eighteen."

Despite that, his hands did not leave Hawks's cold skin. Kaetsu's fingers spasmed and nails dug into Hawks flesh but he was nothing but a puppet and puppets did not react to pain.

"I can't *wait* to break you and make you mine." Kaetsu whispered. His voice was heavier, filled with a feral, aggressive strain that shook Hawks to his core. "You can pretend all you want, but deep down you *know* you deserve this."

Hawks's mind separated further from his body and he observed Kaetsu's actions with hollow apathy because this was nothing more than training. Like how the Commission taught him to fight and save and resist torture, this was nothing more than training because Kaetsu was training him to not cry and show fear.

Heroes could never show fear and Villains were evil and bad and would do anything to hurt and break so Kaetsu was kindly training him in this particular area so he was prepared for the

real world. It was nothing more than training because if it wasn't training his other handlers would come in and stop Kaetsu but they did nothing because it was nothing more than training. It was nothing more than training. Nothing more. Just training so it was normal and fine and he would not cry like a good Hero would not cry.

Deep down, Hawks wondered if this was karma for his selfishness. He had spoken of Quirk compulsions and the terrible things they made people do, and now he wondered if Kaetsu's own compulsions were getting the best of him. That meant this was Hawks's own fault. It was *his* fault a man had been turned into a monster.

Acceptance of his guilt was almost a relief and his tears stopped flowing, leaving him empty and numb.

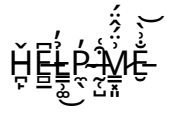
Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

Kaetsu's hand grasped Hawks's throat, squeezing just enough that his vision blurred, and his fear spiked right back up.

His handler chuckled. "Still so afraid. Still so *selfish*. If you'd been a good Hero like we asked, none of this would have happened. You brought this upon yourself, my Angel. Remember… *we own you.*"

"Are you happy, Amplifier?" Hawks heard Pathfinder ask mockingly as he flawlessly flew through an obstacle course the next day. "He doesn't look so 'creepy' today."

"Yeah." Amplifier almost sounded bitter. "He's not smiling anymore."



Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

Hawks's memories became spottier after that. Blackouts were a frequent occurrence even though his body still acted without him. There were no repressed memories to speak of. Hawks had studied repressed memories as part of his lessons to be a good Hero, and his handlers said repressed memories were fabrications created by those fishing for sympathy.

Hawks knew he was one of those people because his memories were spotty and he still cried and would not smile and he was selfish and ungrateful and arrogant and bad, but he tried *not* to be bad he tried he tried *he tried*.

He failed.

He woke in the infirmary more than a couple times with bruises and cuts he did not remember getting. Sometimes, he would wake up with dark contusions on his neck and back, and everything would hurt. The doctors merely sent him on his way as soon as he regained consciousness, giving him back to Kaetsu.

Hawks's performance worsened.

His handlers noticed and called him lazy. They pushed him harder than before, resulting in more visits to the infirmary.

Hawks's performance worsened.

His handlers did nothing when Kaetsu grabbed Hawks by the jaw right in front of them and mocked him for 'playing hard to get' when they both knew Hawks couldn't fight back at all. Hawks heard a few whisper that maybe this would fix Hawks or 'make him stop pretending he wasn't interested' and encourage him to stop 'acting like a stuck up, manipulative brat stringing others along'. They should have let someone do something earlier, some said, to 'finally rid him of that snobby, prudish attitude'.

Hawks could not pretend they were ignorant anymore. His handlers undeniably knew what was happening behind closed doors and now out in the open. They knew what Kaetsu was doing but they did not interfere. They did not care.

Because Hawks deserved it.

Hawks's performance worsened.

Hawks began to practice modeling again, his body splayed in sultry poses in preparation for his inevitable debut. The public would want pinups of the new Hero, after all, and it was his duty as a good Hero to provide. He often cried during the shoots even as his mouth smiled and his eyes slipped into half-lidded, mysterious looks and sometimes he could not stop not matter how much Kaetsu and the other handlers yelled at or shook or hit him.

Kaetsu was especially aggressive after those shoots no matter how compliant Hawks tried to be. He did not mean to be difficult. He really didn't. He couldn't use his voice to apologize.

Hawks's performance worsened.

He stopped eating. Actually, he *did* eat, but it seemed some bodily functions were beyond Kaetsu's control because Hawks's stomach was so twisted with stress that any food he got down came right back up. Kaetsu was always there. He always saw. Always always always, never leaving Hawks alone. Kaetsu did not care when Hawks had nothing left so he spat up stomach acid and merely slapped Hawks for being difficult. At first, his other handlers did not notice Hawks was getting thinner. Once they did— when his important red wings began to turn a sickly grey— he had lost twenty pounds in he span of a few weeks.

Kaetsu forced him to eat like he forced him to everything else, tearing into him for being selfish all the while. Hawks could not stop him. He was just along for the ride.

Hawks's performance worsened.

One day, he *accidentally* flew into a window. He was not in control— *Angel puppet flying with strings. Clip clip clip them away~* Kaetsu was the one flying him around but his handlers yelled that it was his fault when the glass shattered and slivers of glass cut up his face. Kaetsu

stood back and watched him fall to the floor, shivering and bleeding. He laughed as the other handlers scolded him, and Hawks was healed up without a blemish.

The next day he *accidentally* flew— Kaetsu flew him into *no no no don't blame him for your mistakes you self-centered brat*— into another window and was healed again. Not a blemish was left on his face. Not a scar. Because Heroes must look *beautiful* for the public because good Heroes were beautiful and ogled and it didn't matter what he felt.

Kaetsu decided that if Hawks wanted to brain himself enough, he could help with that. He slammed Hawks's head into a doorframe that evening, knocking him out cold.

He woke in the infirmary three days later.

Hawks's performance worsened.

He wondered why the Commission even bothered to keep him alive now.

He was not a good Hero.

He was not a Hero.

He was not a person.

He was an empty doll, a shell, a puppet, *nothing*.

He might as well be dead.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

It was nearing the eleventh month when Hawks came to realize it would end soon.

Nothing had changed, but Hawks knew it would end soon.

It would end soon and Hawks would be free.

Hawks decided he was afraid of freedom.

He was *afraid of freedom*.

He *convinced himself* he was afraid of freedom.

Nine days before Hawks's seventeenth birthday, they were training with blades, his feathers against Pathfinder's sword.

Hawks's speed was phenomenal.

His footing was perfect.

His wings were full.

His feathers were strong.

His costume was clean and carefully placed, unwrinkled by groping, unwanted hands.

His heroic smile was back in place.

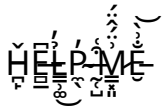
It was the best he had performed in months.

It was better than Pathfinder expected.

Which was why she was completely unprepared when Hawks did not parry a thrust and instead tossed his feather sword aside.

He threw himself forward, but Pathfinder moved at the last second.

So her blade went through Hawks's shoulder instead of his chest.



Hawks woke in the infirmary with a bandaged shoulder. He trembled in pain, reaching up to touch the covered wound, and realized he had been released again. He did not smile, or feel relief.

He knew this reprieve was temporary.

Hawks did try to escape again. He did not move at all. He remained on the bed, shivering, and stared at the ceiling with an empty expression, waiting for the inevitable. A shadow fell over him but he did not look at its source, waiting to be moved like a lifeless doll. A manicured hand grabbed his chin and forced him to turn.

The Commission President scowled down at him.

She was disappointed.

Again.

Hawks's eyes burned but he begged himself not to cry. The President must have seen his unshod tears because she huffed. Beside her, Kaetsu stepped forward on cue.

Hawks did not try to crawl away or hide behind his tattered wings. He did not beg. He did not curl up or cry. He merely shut his eyes and tried to stop his chest from heaving with repressed sobs.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it—

"That's enough." the President said.

Kaetsu halted.

Hawks hesitantly opened his eyes.

The President stared down at Hawks with a cold, remorseless expression. "It seems you've finally learned your lesson."

Hawks knew she expected an answer. He could only manage a quiet whimper. He pressed a hand over his mouth to muffle it but it was too late. The expression on the President's face changed from disappointment to anger.

Hawks stopped trying to muffle himself. His aching shoulder shook as he sobbed openly, barely able to draw in enough air to breathe, but he still did not move because he knew there would be no escape.

"You call yourself a Hero yet you're giving up?"

Hearing Kaetsu's voice, it was all Hawks could do to try to suppress the scream-like wails that built in his throat. He heard his handler step closer but could not see him through the tears clouding his sight.

"How pathetic. If you don't pull yourself together *right now* I'm taking control again." Familiar, unwanted hands grabbed him by his injured shoulders and Kaetsu gave him a shake. "Now stop. *Crying.*"

With a pained gasp, Hawks stopped. He stayed absolutely still, eyes round and glassy from tears he dare not shed.

"Abysmal. Absolutely *abysmal*." The Commission President grabbed his chin again and her nails dug into his flesh. "We've invested too much in your for you to break. *Will* you be a good Hero for Hero Society now?"

The implied 'Or is Kaetsu going to have to take control again?' went unsaid.

Hawks tried to nod, but she was still holding his chin. His muscles locked as he forced himself not to struggle to move his head even though she wanted an answer but he could not answer without moving but if he moved she might see it as being bad he couldn't be bad.

Mercifully, she understood his answer and released him. "Good. You have twenty minutes to clean up. Then you will report to training." She reached out and grasped his injured shoulder, squeezing. Hawks did not utter a sound. "And if you try to pull another escape attempt, Kaetsu will be more than glad to become your personal teacher again. If you die, it is on the *Commission's orders*. Am I understood?"

Hawks wished he could avoid her unforgiving gaze and nodded mutely.

The President let go of him. "Take him to his room."

Hawks only needed to see a glimpse of Kaetsu in his peripheral before he shut his eyes. Hands slipped under his back and knees but he did not struggle, waiting for control of his body to be taken away again.

He immediately knew something was amiss. The arms that held him were sturdy, but not painful. The hands tightened abruptly but not like Kaetsu's would. Hawks still did not

struggle because he could be a good Hero, and good Heroes did not fight the Commission. The Commission was good and he was bad but he would try to obey and be good. He swore he would try…

"I have him." the person carrying him said coolly.

It was not Kaetsu holding him, but Amplifier.

Hawks never felt so relieved. He relaxed but dare not give in to his exhaustion and fall asleep, because if he slept, he was being lazy. Good Heroes were not lazy, and he could try to be a good Hero.

He opened his eyes to acidic green and did not flinch. Heroes did not flinch, and he could try to be a good Hero.

Then black cloth was between him and the green as Amplifier abruptly turned and walked towards the door.

Hawks heard footsteps behind them.

"Agent Kaetsu." the President said. "A word."

The footsteps stopped but that meant nothing. Hawks held his breath and waited.

But nothing happened. Amplifier simply carried Hawks into the hall. There was no pain, or rough grabs, or strikes. In fact, the way the trainer held him could almost be considered *gentle*. Amplifier's arms were sturdy and warm and his hands did not grab hard enough to leave bruises. It was nice.

Hawks shoved down the childish need to lean into that comfort.

'*Keep your problems to yourself and your pain off your face,'* he reminded himself. *'You are a Hero. You provide comfort. You do not need it.'*

Hawks glanced at Amplifier with a plastic smile on his face, praying he had not noticed Hawks's slip up. His trainer did not glance down at him. He did not yell at him, or strike him, or pin him down with cold hands around his throat. He merely carried Hawks to his room and laid him down. Hawks watched him apprehensively, but Amplifier simply grabbed his blanket and pulled it over him.

"I'll be outside. I'll wake you in ten minutes."

With that, Amplifier left.

Hawks could hear him outside. He heard him turn someone away from the door, his voice growing low and snarling. Whoever it was must have left because Hawks did not hear a fight.

No one came in.

No one was able to with Amplifier standing there.

It was almost like he was standing guard.

It may be the nicest thing Amplifier had ever done for Hawks.

A GOOD HERO

In the following weeks, Hawks performed admirably at his work. He worked himself to the bone, all on his own— See? He could be productive and work and injuries would not affect his performance at work and he could be a good Hero, see see see see see *please see*?— until he collapsed. Kaetsu was not there when he woke in his room or the infirmary.

The Commission President, in her generosity, had decided to distance that particular handler from Hawks for the time being. She even let Hawks be *selfish*. She let him sleep, and told the handlers not to hit him too much, and allowed Hawks to put pieces of himself back together so he could smile smiles that were not plastic doll smiles. She was so very very kind even when she seemed annoyed because Hawks knew what the lack of kindness really was now. He had been stupid not to see how generous she was before. He was selfish to try to act out like a spoiled brat when all the Commission wanted to do was make him into the best Hero he could be. Hawks was so grateful to her and the Commission. They had released him, and he dare not— would not betray that trust.

He could be a good Hero. See? He could.

So Hawks pushed himself harder until he collapsed. He woke in the infirmary, and went right back to work until he inevitably collapsed again. No matter how exhausted he felt, he performed each task flawlessly. The whole time, he reminded himself what would happen if he failed, even as his mind tried to protect itself and the memories grew foggy.

None of his handlers mentioned Kaetsu or what happened.

It was as if nothing ever did.

When Hawks gathered his courage and asked who would replace Kaetsu as his 'roommate', he was told to stop lying and making up stories. He never had a 'roommate', they said. Hawks's room was only his, they told him.

The marks in the floor Hawks believed were from Kaetsu's old bed were there one day and gone the next. None of his handlers mentioned Kaetsu at all, and Pathfinder repeatedly mocked him for messing up so badly that she nearly impaled him during a spar. Even Amplifier denied carrying Hawks out of the infirmary on that last, terrible day, though Hawks noticed his fists would always clench as he spoke.

Hawks doubted his own memory and wondered if they had ever been there at all.

Eventually he realized his handlers were right and he had been making it up.

As Hawks's eighteenth birthday drew near— and his debut as a Pro Hero along with it— Kaetsu came back.

Kaetsu came back but he was… different. He was *almost* serene again, like he used to be before Hawks turned him into a monster— but Hawks hadn't done anything because nothing happened, right? Except this serenity was as fake as a doll's plastic smile.

Hawks was not dumb. He knew the signs of remedial courses when he saw them. He stayed away from Kaetsu as much as he could, but it seemed even the Commission's reconditioning methods were not perfect.

Kaetsu began to follow Hawks after training. He cornered him when he was alone and insisted he was too pretty to be a boy. He demanded proof that Hawks was a boy, though whenever he made to grab Hawks, he'd turn a sickly green and stumble away like the thought of touching him repulsed him enough to make him ill. So instead of trying to tear Hawks's clothes away and 'expose' him, Kaetsu tried to ambush him, barging in when he thought Hawks was getting changed.

Hawks did not complain. The Commission had done so much for him and he did not want to inconvenience them so he silently endured.

His only request was to have permission to lock doors.

Life continued.

Slowly, Hawks convinced himself his sixteenth year had been nothing more than a terrible dream.

ALWAYS SMILES

A few months after his grand debut, Hawks saved an Underground Hero from going splat on the concrete.

Mockingjay was an unknown. Rumor had it that she came from America, but even that rumor was shaky at best. With all they knew about her, she could honestly come from space or something. She was an enigma, but an unimportant one. There was no way she was connected to the Commission.

But that was not why Hawks lunged for her so desperately as she fell.

That was not why his heart pounded in his throat until they were both safe on the ground.

He had seen the way she'd fallen.

He had seen her calm expression.

She had gear meant to save her from such a tumble, but she'd used none of it to rescue herself, content to drop to her death.

Hawks did not remember why, but he knew what if felt like to passively accept death should it come.

Hawks did not know Mockingjay at all back then, but he did not want her to die.

Perhaps that was why Hawks followed whenever he saw her, not daring to ask if she was okay. Perhaps that was why he looked past her standoffish exterior and saw how lonely she was. Perhaps that was why he rambled and asked her to join his Agency. Perhaps that was why he beamed as she warmed up to him.

They became friends. Like him and Miruko were friends. Except Mockingjay was a lot more world-weary than Miruko and noticed when he was too quiet after a particularly unnerving encounter with Kaetsu.

One day, Mockingjay demanded to know if Kaetsu had done anything to Hawks.

Hawks claimed his hadn't.

It was not a lie, as far as he knew.

After all, the Commission did not need to take him to remedial courses to make him forget the worst year of his life.

Hawks repressed the memories all on his own.

Mirror, Mirror

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Twenty-two year-old Hawks did not look up from his shaking hands. His knuckles were white and he could feel a prickling sensation spreading through his fingers from a lack of circulation. He did not avert his gaze from his paling digits, keeping them pressed together as his nails bit into his skin. He kept his sight down. Tensei was sitting directly across from him, and he was not ready to see his face.

Looking inward was not much better. The voices' walls kept them from experiencing his memories but he knew they caught flashes. The exchange was not equal on both sides. He could not sense what they were feeling at all. It was almost a relief. He did not want to know their thoughts. He was afraid of what he would see.

"Kaetsu became addicted to the euphoria my fear gave him." Hawks finished his tale in a toneless whisper. "I was almost like a *drug* to him. He's been obsessed with me ever since. I think the Commission let his arrest play out because they could tell he was close to… snapping again and they didn't want him near me in case I broke again. They wanted me *obedient*, not dead. I wasn't… I wasn't *perfect* but I was obedient *enough* until… Amplifier attacked me. And I *fought back*."

Hawks's voice cracked as he realized the true weight of what he had done. He had fought the Commission and Kaetsu was free, ready to be used on him again. The anxiety that had been building inside him reached a new high and he hunched his shoulders, denying how they shook.

Tensei was silent.

The voices were silent as well. All eight of them.

Hawks may as well be alone. He wished he *was* alone, because as minutes or hours or eons passed and the silence grew more and more oppressive, his hands squeezed tighter until he was sure he would break his own fingers. His breathing grew rapid and his throat and eyes burned but he did not cry because Heroes *did not cry*.

They hate me they're disgusted they know I'm weak they know it's my fault I shouldn't have said anything they think I deserve it I should have kept my mouth shut they hate me they're disgusted they blame me ***they're right***—

"I'm sorry I burdened you with this." Hawks croaked. "I shouldn't have dropped all this on you. But I needed to talk to *someone*. When Endeavor attacked me, all I could think of was *him* and the memories came back. I couldn't tell Rumi or Katniss. They'd be angry. Not at me, I think, but— I-I *can't*. Aizawa…" Hawks blinked rapidly, breathing sharp. "I can't bear for him to know how *stupid* I was. And Toshinori would tell All Might so…" He stood abruptly. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have used you like this. I'll leave now—"

"No." Tensei said, voice low. "You don't have to leave, or apologize." He stood as well, but only to settle on the couch next to Hawks's position. "If you want to keep talking, I'm listening. If you don't want to talk any more, I'm still here for you. In a year, or five, or ten, I'll *still* be here to help you."

Hawks slowly sat back down. He felt the voices shift, but they were muffled, like they were keeping their distance from him. His hands quivered and more imprints joined the other nail marks in his flesh. Were they that disgusted with him? Did they not believe him? Did they think he wanted this?

"*We'd never blame you."* Red croaked, making Hawks jump.

Her emotions washed over him— sorrow, support, compassion, protectiveness, determination — and he realized the voices were giving him space so they did not overwhelm him. There was guilt there too as they comprehended just what they had done when they took over without telling Hawks, but the voices stubbornly squashed it, adamant that they would not cause Hawks more distress.

Despite that support, Hawks wished he could hide. From them, from Tensei, and from himself.

Do you think less of me, knowing that I let myself be controlled by a Quirk that isn't even explicitly for mind control? Are you disgusted with how weak I am that I let him use me like an empty doll?

"Never." Red repeated, voice rough.

Green appeared so suddenly that Hawks physically jumped. *"Please don't tell me you've been so willing to let us have control because you wanted to make yourself used to losing it."*

Hawks wished he could vanish. He hugged himself, trying not to feel more worthless than he already did. "I didn't want that. I swear I didn't. Please don't be angry."

"I am not angry at you." Tensei said, mistakenly believing Hawks had been speaking to him. Or maybe Hawks *was*. "Hawks, what happened to you was *not* your fault and you did *not* ask for any of this."

Hawks did not bother to hide his disbelief. How could Tensei believe such lies?

"Yes it was my fault." Hawks confessed steadily. "I was arrogant, and stupid, and naive enough to act like a lazy, cowardly, ungrateful brat who wanted to redeem Villains."

Tensei's expression was solemn. "Hawks, the Commission didn't want to use those programs because they decrease Villain activity and give Heroes less to do. That would make the Commission less profit. 'Laziness' was just their excuse to hurt you."

He sounded so certain that Hawks initially could not find the words to contradict him. His mouth moved wordlessly until he eventually found his voice. "That's not true. I… I was acting unheroic."

"Preventing people from becoming Villains and helping them reform is *not* 'unheroic'." Tensei stated. Again, he sounded so sure, like he was stating simple facts. Tensei caught Hawks's eye and his voice grew gentler. "Why can other Heroes use such methods and not you?"

Hawks lost his voice again. "I— I, uh—" His mind failed him as he tried to come up with a logical reason, only to come up blank. Icy panic tore through his gut and he hunched over, hugging himself tighter. "It's not that any of that matters or anything." he rambled. "My selfish and snobby attitude was reason enough for them to do that."

"There is *no* reason for them to hurt you." Tensei emphasized like he was stating facts instead of misinformed opinions. "*None.*"

Why was he saying this? Why was he acting this way? He should be disgusted or at least find Hawks pitiful and weak. But Tensei did not look at Hawks with pity. He did not look at him like he was stupid for failing to see what he did. Instead he just looked calm, and stable, and *there*, as if Hawks were owed his full attention with none of the harsh judgment he deserved.

Hawks did not understand. He could not understand. Why did Tensei not see Hawks was the one in the wrong? Why did he not see Hawks was the reason Kaetsu became what he did? Why did he not see Hawks brought this upon himself? Why couldn't he see Hawks was the one to blame for his own misery?

Confusion became desperation to prove him wrong and Hawks grasped his coat. "The Commission didn't do *this* to me."

Hawks pulled his coat off and yanked his top aside just enough to reveal the jagged scar on his chest, right below his collar bone. It was colored by bruises from Endeavor's attack, but the scar was still clearly visible. On his back, it was even clearer to see where Pathfinder's blade had run him through.

"I wanted to die." Hawks admitted in a tone more appropriate for giving students a boring verbal lesson about how to patrol efficiently. "I wanted to die so badly I convinced myself I was afraid to be free so I could use Kaetsu's Quirk to my advantage. I threw myself on a sword hoping it'd go through my heart. I'm manipulative, and cowardly, and selfish so I wanted to take the easy way out." He pretended his voice did not crack.

Tensei glanced down at the scar but his gaze quickly returned to Hawks's face. Having not expected that— people always stared— Hawks lingered uncertainly, leaving the mark exposed. Did he want Hawks to remove his shirt or something? Did he need more proof? Did he think Hawks was lying—?

Tensei frowned and slowly reached out, as if he were making sure Hawks had time to lean away. He pulled Hawks's coat back up his arm and laid his hands on his shoulders. Both of them.

"Hawks, are you thinking about killing yourself?"

Hawks stared at him in a detached type of bewilderment, feeling like a bomb had blown up in his face and he not had no idea what to do next. "Of course not. I can't die now. People need me to be alive."

The voices grew tense.

Tensei did not. He remained calm and gentle, as solid as a rock. "I'm sorry to have to ask this." he said, quiet but firm. "But just to clarify… the Commission knew Kaetsu was sexually abusing you?"

Hawks flinched and his wings closed protectively around himself. "No! I mean, *yes* they knew Kaetsu was… doing things but it wasn't— *that*. It was for training. Because sometimes Villains might try… things. So Kaetsu was training me to prepare me." Deep down, Hawks knew that wasn't true. He swallowed. "But uh, even if it wasn't training then it, um, it still wasn't sexual abuse because he didn't rape me."

In his line of work, saying words like that was common, but here it felt wrong to even speak those words, like he was trivializing the suffering of others who had *actually* gone through that type of thing for daring to think his own trauma came close. Yes, he obviously knew sexual abuse included non-consensual kissing and touching but…

Hawks realized he'd made the Commission the villains again and rushed to clarify. "The President stopped it after Kaetsu let me go. They tried to help, really. They tried to make him stop with remedial courses but it didn't work. They knew about it but it wasn't…" He slowly realized what he was defending. "…their fault?"

Tensei did not argue with him. He still didn't look pitying or disgusted.

"May I hug you?" he asked abruptly.

Hawks's brow furrowed but he nodded cautiously. He stayed in place as—with slow and deliberate movements— Tensei embraced him. Tensei's arms were warm. They were firm. Like Miruko's hugs, but… softer. Not like Hawks would break if he was held too tightly, but like Tensei was consciously lingering, ready to hold Hawks up if he began to fall. Hawks resisted the desire to lean his head on Tensei's shoulder and tried his best to ignore his body's panicked mantra of '*don't seek comfort don't seek comfort don't seek comfort—*'

"I'll help you get support." Tensei stated. "Things *will* get better."

The offer of support made Hawks as nervous as the promise of improvement gave him hope.

"Please don't tell anyone." he pleaded.

"I won't." Tensei promised. "If you ever want to come forward, it will be *your* choice."

"Thank you." Hawks pulled away and rubbed at his eyes. He glanced at the time and was stunned by how late it was. How long had he been speaking? He should leave but it would be risky to fly so late at night with the Commission and Kaetsu out there. "I'm sorry to be a bother but can I spend the night? I can't go to Rumi's and I don't want to be alone."

"You are *not* a bother." Tensei stated. He crossed his arms. "Tenya might be coming over with Shoto. Is that alright?"

Hawks wondered how this man could be real. Even after Hawks admitted what a weak, manipulative, and dangerous risk he was to be around, Tensei was still okay with him being near his brother?

"*Tensei does **not** blame you."* Silver whispered in his ear.

It should be a reminder, but it felt more like a confirmation.

Hawks should know better than to feel that way but he did.

He nodded hesitantly. "Seeing them is okay." He clasped his hands together and forced himself not to rock from side to side like a guilty child. "You… won't say anything? About the Commission? Or Endeavor?"

"No." Tensei assured him. "You can choose who you want to know."

It was weird that Tensei kept saying that but Hawks would vehemently deny that reassurance relieved him.

Tensei gave him one more, comforting squeeze and released him again. "I'll get the first aid kit to clean you up."

"We should take those pictures first." Hawks mumbled. "For evidence."

Tensei leaned so he was looking Hawks in the eye. "Do you want to?"

Hawks bit his lip. "I… should...n't?" His teeth broke through the skin. "Would this help or hinder the case for him abusing his family? Miruko's been compiling evidence and I don't want to mess it up and have people focus on this when it's his family that's been hurt and deserves justice but maybe if this is brought up it would help their case and people would bother me instead of them because I doubt they want to be dragged into the media circus and I can handle it—"

"Hawks." Tensei said gently, interrupting his rambling. "Do *you want* me to take those pictures?"

Hawks finally comprehended what was weird— *familiar*— about his tone and questions. It was the kind he himself used with Eri. The realization rattled him and he averted his gaze.

"Yes." he said. *It might help Shoto's case.*

Ingenium went through the process of taking pictures of Hawks's injuries with calm professionalism. Hawks knew the procedure by heart and being on the receiving end was humiliating no matter how much Pink, Silver, Red, and White soothed him and whispered that he was doing okay.

Hawks tried to comfort himself with the knowledge that it was simply documenting evidence for injuries and not a more invasive kind of test and his self-loathing tripled. How could he feel that way? Would any of the Todorokis be 'relieved' that they had to show off the marks their father left on them?

"*You should take your own advice."* White said, but there was no judgment in his tone. *"You don't need to compare our past traumas."*

Hawks tried to take his words to heart and it helped a little.

Ingenium locked the photos and Hawks's statement about Endeavor in a safe meant for such things and Tensei came back with the first aid kit and an extra set of clothes. He began bandaging Hawks's injuries and applying lotion to the burns, telling Hawks what he was doing and seeking permission before touching him. There were more injuries than Hawks had thought. His throat grew tight.

"Shoto is staying over with Tenya at our parents' place. They'll be over tomorrow so it'll just be the two of us tonight. Do you want something to eat?" Tensei asked.

Hawks's stomach grumbled and he nodded.

"What would you like to eat?"

Hawks shrugged.

"There is a Pho place that delivers." Tensei offered. "I often go there whenever I'm here." He startled, as though recalling an important detail. "Er, Pho is a Vietnamese soup with spices and thinly cut beef or chicken, usually. Does that sound good?"

Hawks nodded again.

Well. It looked like he was done talking for the day. That was unfortunate.

Tensei did not seem to mind. He got the menu and Hawks pointed to what he wanted. He got changed out of his costume and into the clothes. They were a too big for him, but the sweatpants had a drawstring he could use to keep them up. The sweatshirt was a simple green, with no Hero logo. Hawks knew Tensei had drawers of Hero merch thanks to Silver's memories— *Don't think about that.*— but appreciated the lack of them.

The sweatshirt also had slits in the back that most likely had not been there a few minutes ago. Hawks tried to focus on his gratefulness rather than his guilt, because it was kind of Tensei to cut holes in the shirt for him.

Hawks remained far out of sight when the delivery was made. Those at the restaurant knew Tensei since he was a regular customer, but Hawks did not want his presence know. He did not want the reporters to follow him here, and they certainly would as soon as they got word of his location. As he… sat— *not* hid— behind a wall he heard the deliveryman ask if Tenya was over again. Tensei laughed and gave a vague answer.

"*Gold."* Green murmured and Hawks jumped. *"I'm sorry."*

Hawks's inability to speak had spread to even his thoughts and he could not muster more than vague feelings of confusion.

"*We used you for our own ends."* Green said. *"We were acting for 'the good of others', just like what the Commission claimed."*

His voice trembled and his guilt was so blatant it may as well be a neon sign. That would not do.

Not like Commission, Hawks sent to him firmly.

Green's disagreement was clear. In fact, it was impossible to ignore with the guilt and self-loathing he emanated. *"You're **wrong**. Gol— ...Hawks, before we came back and ended up like this, our— **my** plan was to let you infiltrate the League again. In fact, much of our plan banked on that since we wanted the information your spy self had. I was willing to have you go on a suicide mission again for information."*

A bunch of small oddities about Green suddenly made a lot of sense. Unintentionally— because Green was too kind to consciously think it— he had seen Hawks as an expendable party. After all, with Tokoyami dead Hawks was a long-dead stranger to Green and his friends. And to save those lost friends, Hawks was a sacrifice that could be made. That was, until they had ended up in Hawks's head— in the head of the person they may have seen as an acceptable loss— making that option impossible.

Hawks was expendable. He had been the one who would infiltrate the League for the good of the many, leaving the pressure of gathering intel and saving Hero Society on his shoulders once more until he was likely caught again and murdered.

That had been his intended purpose in Green's plan before everything went wrong.

It was a relief to finally know what his role was meant to be.

Hawks relaxed, his feathers lying flat. *It's okay, Green. I'm not upset. I understand why you were willing to let me go on that mission. Hero Society is more important than my life.*

Anguish erupted from Green and he fled.

Orange gave a low whistle. *"Damn. That might have been the absolute **worst** thing you could say right then."*

"*Don't apologize."* Pink said before Hawks could do just that. Her somber mood dragged down his own before she could reel it in. *"Deku realized it was impossible to save everyone a long time ago. He is not some god who can warp the universe to make sure every person lives and is happy. Izuku is idealistic and determined and heroic and strong, but he's not all-powerful. No one is. So all he can do is protect those he can and… sometimes there is bias."* Silver shifted but Pink kept speaking before he could. "*It's hit him hard."*

That was an understatement. Hawks could feel the dorms rattling as green smoke slipped through the windows. The voices retreated to try to minimize the damage and speak with

Green. Hawks should apologize to him, but Orange insisted he not before locking the door between them.

That left Hawks to eat Pho with Tensei. Tensei filled the silent air with chatter about his family, pointing out different pictures and explaining the backstory behind them. Tenya Iida was in many of them but Silver did not emerge to comment. Hawks may as well be alone in his head. He was too emotionally drained to feel guilty about spending time with the brother Silver had lost.

After dinner, they watched the old *Solar Fighting Robot* movies. The corny action and rubbery special effects brought a smile to Hawks's face. By the time they all were over it was almost midnight. Tensei did not appear tired but going to bed seemed like the next logical step. He gave Hawks a pair of spare pajamas— again with a handy drawstring and slits in the back— and gave a heartfelt goodnight as he headed to the door of the guest room.

"I have nightmares." Hawks blurted before he could leave. Tensei paused and looked back so he dropped his gaze to the floor. "I might scream."

"Do you want me to try to wake you?" Tensei asked.

"Only if I'm annoying." Hawks joked, as was his habit.

Tensei did not smile. "You're not annoying."

Hawks knew what he was implying— that Hawks was not a nuisance and would not be kicked out for waking up screaming— but ignored that information. "Are you sure about that? Cause I know plenty of people who would beg to differ."

Tensei was still watching him with those knowing, compassionate eyes, and Hawks swallowed the sudden desire to scream at him to stop it. That look was almost worse than pity, because genuine compassion implied Hawks wasn't the stupid one responsible for what happened to give him those nightmares.

"*You're not responsible."* Red said.

Hypocrite, Hawks thought. He immediately winced. *Sorry.*

"*You're not wrong about hypocrisy."* Red acknowledged.

Hawks blinked and Tensei was sitting in a chair by his guest bed. He glanced at the time. It was now two-thirty. He felt his skin drain of color and he dropped his gaze.

"Sorry. That hasn't happened in a while. I'm… sorry for keeping you up." He cringed. "*Shit*, I keep apologizing. Sorry. I mean— Sorry. *No* I—" He gave up on speaking and put his head in his hands. His head immediately snapped back up. "I forgot to tell Rumi where I am." He rose from the bed and frantically dug through his pockets. "She'll be freaking out by now. I'm so *stupid*—"

"I told her." Tensei assured him.

"Oh." Hawks relaxed. "Thank you. Sorry for freaking out on—" He stopped and took a deep breath. *Focus on the positive, you* ***self-centered, miserable asshole***. "Thank you for helping me. You didn't have to."

"I wanted to." Tensei said simply.

Hawks's lips twitched but he could not manage a smile. Something that had been nagging at his thoughts finally became comprehensible and he focused on his hands. "You know… the Commission always encouraged me to stay away from certain Heroes. All Might, Best Jeanist, Fatgum, Eraserhead, you… The only reason I got close to Miruko back then was because she decided to be my friend. The Commission always said those Heroes would be bad influences since they would look down on me for my age and would treat me like I was incompetent or beneath them. But it's not true at all. It's because you would've *helped*, isn't it?"

"Yes." Tensei stated, like it was simple fact. He put a hand on Hawks's arm, drawing his attention back to his face. "It is *not* your fault that you didn't see something wrong in their ways of controlling you and cutting you off from those that would assist you."

"…Are you sure you're not a mind reader?" Hawks joked weakly.

"I'm not. I've just dealt with cases similar to yours. There tends to be a lot of misplaced self-blame involved."

"I know those cases, too." Hawks murmured, thinking of Eri. "But I was too blind to see it in myself."

"It's not your fault." Tensei repeated.

Hawks wondered if he'd believe that someday. He mumbled a goodnight to Tensei and laid in the unfamiliar bed, staring up at the dark ceiling.

Red tapped his mind like she was gently knocking on a door. *"Gold? Do you want to come in?"*

Hawks emitted a negative response without intending to.

"*Okay."* Red said agreeably.

Hawks's guilt multiplied. *I'm sorry.*

"*For what?"*

For being weak like this when you've gone through so much worse.

"*You are not 'weak'."* Red stated.

Hawks wanted to deny it but realized what she must be getting at. If he was considered 'weak', then they would be considered 'weak' for reacting to their own tragedies like they did. Hawks swallowed an apology.

"*Oh, Gold."* Red murmured sadly. *"I wish your kindness, understanding, and compassion extended to yourself."*

Hawks shifted uncomfortably. *I don't understand.*

"*I know."* She hesitated. *"I think we should talk about your… feelings."*

I've done a lot of talking about feelings, Hawks thought tiredly.

"*I know."* she repeated. *"However, I would like to have something clarified, if you are willing."*

Hawks nodded.

He felt Red steel herself. *"If we were not here with you, would you kill yourself to ensure the Commission does not harm your loved ones?"*

It depends on the situation. If I was certain they would not go after my friends once I died and my death would get the Commission to leave them alone, yes. Hawks thought instantly. *If I died, the Commission would not give a damn about Tokoyami. UA would not be in conflict with them. They would put Kaetsu right back in jail where he can't hurt anyone. Miruko would not have to go on her mission. I… wouldn't burden them anymore.*

He heard her sniffle, as if she was holding back tears. *"Thank you for trusting me with your thoughts. I won't assume to understand what you're feeling, but there is one thing I do know: You are **not** a burden. You matter. We will stay with you."*

You don't have a choice, Hawks thought despite himself.

Orange popped his head out. *"Don't be obtuse. We'd stay anyway, dumbass."*

The response was so typically Orange that Hawks could not refute it. He closed his eyes and thought he heard someone humming somewhere in his mind. The song was soothing and his anxious thoughts slipped away.

Hawks fell asleep feeling safer than he had in a while.

He did not have any nightmares.

XXXXXXX

Shoto had no idea how he got here.

After visiting Eri, his initial plan had been to go home and train like he always did. Instead Iida had caught him outside and enthusiastically invited him to his house. Shoto debated on whether or not to go for a good few minutes while Iida waited. His father had an assignment and might not be home, but he could very well show up to find Shoto wasn't there. Seeing Iida's hopeful expression— which would be described as 'menacingly enthusiastic eye gleams' by most people— he relented.

One text to Fuyumi and he was on his way to the Iida household. His friend's mother and father were there, though his brother were out of town. They greeted Shoto warmly, welcoming him into their home with an ease he found perplexing. The way they smiled at him— with such open warmth— one would mistakenly believe they knew him well. Shoto wondered if maybe Iid— er, Tenya had spoken of him often.

Tenya's distant cousin was apparently staying over as well. The cheerful man waved to Shoto but did not attempt to talk to him. That comforted Shoto somewhat. People so often came up to him because he was Endeavor's son, not because of Shoto himself. That was starting to change thanks to UA, but not as quickly as he would like.

Shoto had never been to a sleepover before. Neither had Tenya, though he knew more about what friends apparently did at them. He gravely instructed Shoto they would not be partaking in a pillow fight, but eating snacks— both healthy and unhealthy, for this was a "special occasion" according to Tenya— watching movies, and playing game was more than acceptable.

They stayed up late doing just those things, and Shoto went to bed thinking about a fantasy world with magic instead of Quirks, where wizards and knights journeyed through the land to stop a great evil.

Waking up in the morning was pleasant. The smell of freshly-cooked food drew Shoto from sleep. He rose from his futon and saw Tenya was already awake. Shoto peeked into the kitchen and saw the Iida family preparing breakfast, all dressed in their pajamas. Seeing that, he felt less awkward about emerging in his own, and crept into the kitchen.

Tenya beamed at him. "Good morning, Shoto! My brother has invited us to his home."

"He doesn't live here?" Shoto asked as he sat down. Mrs. Iida put a plate in front of him and he murmured a thank you.

"Tensei has his own home as well as this one. He goes there to get away from the city." Tenya explained. "He finds the atmosphere relaxing."

When the Iida parents dropped them off at the site— apparently they had errands to run— Shoto could see why. As soon as he stepped out of the car, a sense of tranquility fell over him. It was so… *quiet*. He could hear the wind rustling through the trees, and a few birds sang in the distance, but the atmosphere could not be more different from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Tenya walked right up to the door and opened it, ushering Shoto in. Shoto's concern about the apparently unlocked door vanished when he spotted the key in Tenya's hand. Shoto followed Tenya's lead and put his shoes by the door.

"Tensei!" Tenya called in the house. "We have arrived!"

Soft footsteps came from upstairs. Shoto glanced towards the staircase and felt his eyebrows shoot upwards. He did not expect to find Hawks here.

The Winged Hero appeared… different. He wore ill-fitting clothes that likely belonged to Tensei, hanging off his frame and making him appear smaller than he actually was. His skin looked too pale, and there was obvious bruising marking his flesh. But what concerned Shoto most was his posture. His shoulders were hunched and his arms were crossed, not like they had merely settled like that but like he was trying to physically hold himself together. He looked *exhausted*.

Despite that, he smiled when he spotted the boys, though he did not speak. His smile reminded Shoto of his mother on her worse days. It was a smile that spoke of pain the person was trying not to show in order to keep up the spirits of those they smiled at.

"Hawks-sensei!" Tenya greeted. His blue eyes sharpened behind his glasses. "You are badly injured."

Shoto had not even noticed the bandages peeking out of the collar of the sweatshirt. Hawks startled, wings flaring out in surprise as if he had forgotten about his injuries himself. His mouth moved wordlessly and he cleared his throat.

"I'm fine. Got a bit beat up is all. It looks worse than it is." Something about his tone struck Shoto as odd but he could not say what.

"I see. It must have been a tough fight." Tenya noted. "Did you arrest the Villain?"

Hawks grimaced. "It wasn't a Villain."

Tenya's brow crinkled in confusion. Shoto's mind jumped to a few uncomfortable possibilities but he dismissed them. Hawks must have been injured in training or something. Tensei appeared at the top of the stairs and greeted the boys with a smile. His was much less tired than Hawks's.

"I saw a family of rabbits outside under a tree. I didn't see the nest so I don't know how they got there."

Hawks's tired smile became a more natural, familiar grin. "*Please* tell me there are baby ones. I need to take pictures to send to Rumi to inform her I found her long-lost relatives."

Shoto opened his mouth, realized that was a joke, and closed it.

"I saw a few small ones, yes." Tensei said, amused. "You know you're not supposed to touch wild animals, right?"

"I got my rabies shot." Hawks said, straight-faced. "I know bunnies can be dangerous but they are too *cute*. Even Rumi is taken in by their adorableness and she has a Rabbit Quirk."

Tensei— and surprisingly Tenya— led the way outside. The family of bunnies was indeed at the base of the tree. Shoto followed the others' leads by moving quietly, and soon they were settled around the tree and the bunch of tiny balls of fur.

There were nine baby rabbits in total, all of them old enough to move around and look at the humans curiously. Some were bold enough to hop right up to them, tiny noses twitching. The

mother was nowhere in sight. Three of the rabbits stopped in front of Shoto, sniffing him, before they abruptly clambered into his lap. Shoto watched them in bewilderment and looked to Tenya for clarification.

"It's okay." His classmate assured him seriously. "As long as we do not try to take them inside, they will be fine."

"But where's their nest?" Hawks asked. He glanced around worriedly even as two rabbits settled in his lap and another one nudged his right wing with its nose.

"These ones are about the size of a chipmunk." Tenya said confidently. "They are old enough to be on their own."

"You've done this before?" Shoto whispered, not daring to raise his voice as one rabbit nudged his hand in interest.

Tenya almost seemed embarrassed. "Yes. I come here often, and kits are numerous here."

It took Shoto a moment to realize 'kit' was the word for a baby rabbit. To him it was strange, since he associated kit with kittens or baby foxes. He carefully moved his hand and patted the bunny's head. Its eyes closed in content.

Shoto had thought the rabbits would panic when they saw Hawks— bird of prey and all that — but instead they gathered on him like he was one of their own. If Hawks beamed any more Shoto may wonder if he secretly had a Quirk that allowed him to glow. One rabbit proved to be bolder than the others and climbed right into Hawks's open palm. It was smaller than his hand, and seemed to be the smallest in the group.

"You're so *tiny*." Hawks cooed. "Look at you! Tiny bunny!"

Shoto had never seen his mentor like this before. He had not seen Tenya— who was grinning like a fool at his own furry friends— like this before either. As he studied the tiny, soft ears as they twitched and flicked, Shoto almost wished he had Koda's Quirk so he could do this more often. Then he realized he *could* just ask Koda for assistance and his heart grew lighter.

"Hey Shoto!" Hawks whispered. "Here you go."

Hawks carefully handed him the tiniest bunny.

Shoto stared at it uncertainly.

It stared back.

"You are very small." Shoto informed it.

The tiny bunny blinked as if in acknowledgment.

Hawks chuckled. "Toshinori would love this."

"Who?" Shoto asked.

"All Might's secretary." Hawks supplied easily. "If you ever want to see a seven foot tall man melt into a puddle of baby-talking goo, show him a video with a cute animal in it."

Shoto frowned. "Is melting into 'goo' his Quirk—?" Realization struck him. "Ah. That is another joke."

Hawks muffled his laughter. He seemed so much happier than he had when Shoto saw him this morning that he could almost convince himself he had imagined his mentor's earlier misery.

A few of the rabbits wandered off but the tiny one stayed with Shoto. Shoto kept his palms open and let the rabbit sit serenely in them, trying to ignore his sadness as he realized it was inevitably going to leave. Hawks seemed to be struck by that same feeling because his joy dimmed into something more morose.

The rabbit left the warmth of Shoto's hands and prodded at Hawks's, who stayed still. It climbed into his palms again and settled down. Hawks smiled in such contentment Shoto could not help but feel jealous. He heard a soft click and saw Tensei had taken a picture. He might have been for a while. Shoto had not exactly been paying attention.

The peaceful atmosphere was ruined when Tenya gave a thunderous sneeze.

The rabbit startled and launched itself off Hawks's palms, then ricocheted off his chest, springing into the woods and vanishing. Its feet left muddy footprints down Hawks's front from where it made its hasty escape. He watched it darken the fabric and drip onto his pants with a resigned expression.

"Abandoned again." Hawks sighed. He accepted the towel Tensei shoved at him. "Got any stain remover?"

"Only the detergent type." Tensei said, sounding amused.

"My apologies, Hawks." Tenya said rapidly.

Hawks waved, unbothered. "It's okay. No harm done."

Tensei handed him another towel. "I'll get you another shirt. How about you remove that one?"

"Thanks." Hawks hurried back inside.

The others followed him, with Tenya mentioning he needed to change as well. Shoto belatedly noticed the dirt on his friend's slacks and checked his own clothes, relieved he was not grimy. As Tenya got changed, he followed Tensei upstairs, debating with himself.

Tensei glanced back at him. "Do you have a question?"

"Yes." Shoto admitted. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. "Are there a lot of animals here?"

"Yes." Tensei said simply, but there was something… *knowing* in his eyes.

Shoto awkwardly averted his gaze to the side. "Do you ever… need to take care of them? If they're hurt or something?"

Tensei's expression softened. "Not usually, but I have occasionally taken some to the vet in town. That is a rare instance, however."

Shoto could not hide his disappointment. "Oh."

"However," Tensei continued. "If you're interested in that type of thing, there are animal clinics around Mustafu. They accept volunteers. I can recommend some places to you."

Shoto smiled hesitantly. "Thank you."

Tensei began to list some of those places as he went into his room and grabbed a shirt with a high collar for Hawks. Shoto listened with rapt attention, making mental notes on the different places as he brainstormed how to actually become involved there. Heroes helped save animals and pets along with people, so it would be beneficial to learn how to care for animals along with people. It would be bad publicity if pets died on his patrol.

Tensei's phone rang a jaunty, upbeat tune that Shoto recognized from one of All Might's commercials. Tensei startled as if he did not expect to hear that ringtone and glanced at his phone. His gaze sharpened.

"I need to take this. Can you bring these to Hawks? He's in the guest room down the hall."

Shoto nodded and accepted the clothes.

Tensei put his phone to his ear and headed back to his room. "Hello, Koichi. Thank you for responding so quickly—"

His bedroom door shut.

Shoto went down the hall to another closed door, which he guessed was the guest room. He raised his hand to knock, only for a sound to stop him. He paused, listening closely, and heard another sound, like someone was struggling to breathe.

"Hawks?" he called, concerned.

There was no reply. The gasping sounds continued, low and wheezing like Hawks was trying to muffle himself.

Or someone was muffling him.

Shoto grasped the door handle and yanked it open.

The first thing he saw was Hawks was alone, standing in the center of the room with hunched, shaking shoulders.

The second was he was shirtless.

The third was he had bandages around his arms and chest, carefully wrapped to account for his wings.

The fourth were the *burns* on his neck and shoulders.

Shoto froze, and the ice on his right side dissipated.

Hawks wheeled around to face him, skin ashen, eyes wild, wings flared, chest heaving. His hands twitched upward, and Shoto wondered if he had thought about covering his burns before deciding against it. His mouth moved wordlessly for a few moments before a shudder passed through his body.

"Sorry." he panted. "Anxiety attack. Snuck up on me. Realized I was taking a day o-off. Taking a day off, *me*? Me taking day off ha. Ha*ha*. Shit, *shut up*. It's fine. I'm fine now." He straightened up with blatant effort— as if the weight of the world had settled on his shoulders — and put on an equally forced smile. "Are those for me? Thanks."

Shoto barely noticed as Hawks took the shirt from his numb fingers.

His eyes remained on his mentor's marred throat and the marks on his neck that were undeniably in the shape of handprints.

Hawks had been *burned*.

Someone had grabbed him with *burning hands*.

Shoto could not tear his gaze away from the marks, even after Hawks covered them with his shirt.

"Did you fight Dabi?" he blurted. "Is that who injured you?"

Hawks's shoulders tensed and his wings went rigid. "No."

"Oh. I see. So you didn't fight Dabi. I see that." Shoto rambled numbly. Without realizing it, he began to shake his head in denial. "You— *Where* did you get those burns?"

A pained look crossed Hawks's face. "I think you know."

Shoto's could feel his heartbeat in his head. It drummed against his skull and made his brain foggy and slow. His fingertips prickled with every pulse.

"He hurt you." It wasn't a question.

"Yes." Hawks said. His voice was soft and gentle in sharp contrast to his admission. "I know what he's done. What he's *doing*. Another Hero is investigating."

Those words failed to mean anything to Shoto. He heard them, but something prevented them from making sense. Instead they bounced around his brain, repeating themselves, but

remained as decipherable as gibberish.

"He *knows* you know?" he asked, dazed.

"Yes." Hawks said bluntly. "What would you like me to do?"

Shoto stared at him in bewilderment. "Do? Why would you *do* anything?"

"Because he's hurting you and your family." The explanation was spoken briefly, simply, as if it should be obvious but Hawks realized Shoto did not know it.

Shoto still did not *understand*. "Yes, but you're supposed to not talk about it."

The shift in Hawks's expression was subtle, but Shoto saw it anyway. It was not sadness that darkened his expression, but something much more haunted, like he was looking into a mirror. "Who told you that?"

"No one." Shoto admitted. "But Fuyumi and Natsuo don't say anything. And Midoriya didn't tell anyone after I told him so…"

He trailed off as he registered the look on Hawks's face. His eyes were glassy and he blinked rapidly.

"I can't say what they're thinking," Hawks said, and his voice trembled like he was barely holding back tears. "But you *don't* have to keep silent. You don't have to live like this."

Shoto did not know what to say.

He thought of Natsuo avoiding Endeavor but staying around for his and Fuyumi's sakes. He thought of his mother, sitting in a lonely bed as she stared tiredly out the window. He thought of Touya, who he never got to know. He thought of Fuyumi doing so much out of hope that one day things would change, only to remain as noticed at paint on the walls.

But… things *weren't* changing.

All Might was still Number One. Endeavor was still Number Two. He still pushed Shoto to do what he was furious to see he himself could not, forsaking their family for his goals. Fuyumi was still ignored, Natsuo was still wary and angry, Mom was still in the hospital, Shoto was still trained for a goal he did not want for himself.

Things *weren't changing*.

But maybe they could.

Maybe they *should*.

Shoto forced his trembling hands into fists. "Can you keep my Mom safe?"

"Absolutely." He took a small breath that hissed between his teeth. "It'll be easy enough to get her out of the psych ward since any doctor who looks at her file could see she should have

been released years ago. When she's out, there are different options. Depending on what danger you think she may be in, we have moving programs and safe houses in this country and others. As for your siblings—"

"He's never hurt Natsuo or Fuyumi physically." Shoto blurted. "He hardly acknowledges them. Natsuo is away at school most of the time anyway. He lives in the dorms most of the time."

"Is Fuyumi financially dependent on *him*?" Hawks asked, and Shoto was grateful he did not say his father's name.

"I… don't know." Shoto admitted. "Fuyumi is a teacher. The pay isn't the best but she should be able to afford a—"

Shoto remembered Fuyumi making him meals and snacks and making sure he ate enough. He remembered her helping him wrap up his injuries. He remembered her lingering outside the dojo and smiling in relief when he emerged.

"She's staying for me." he breathed. His expression went blank. "She— She doesn't want me to be alone with only him." It hit him how much his sister had done for him, things he had not bothered to notice. He took her actions for granted, just like Endeavor did, leaving Fuyumi there and unnoticed as always. His vision blurred. "She's staying because of me. Our family is like this because of *me*."

It was because of his Quirk that Endeavor cast Touya and their mother aside, seeing no more use in them. Shoto did not cry, but his eyes burned with tears.

Hawks's hand was on his shoulder. It was warm and carefully placed, as lightly as one of his feathers. He waited until Shoto looked at him to speak.

"It's not your fault."

The way Hawks said it was strange. Haunted. Shoto studied his face and although Hawks smiled reassuringly, his eyes had tears in them.

"Are you alright?" He asked cautiously, shelving his guilt out of concern for the other.

For a moment, he thought Hawks might actually begin crying. He nodded, blinking rapidly. "Yeah. I just… realized some friends of mine might be right about something." He dragged a hand over his eyes. "Do you want to call your sister?"

Shoto nodded.

XXXXXXX

Rei Todoroki was removed from the Mustafa Psych Ward to a secure safe house within the week. Hawks did not know how Miruko, Ingenium, and Mockingjay did it— perhaps Rumi had more evidence than Hawks was aware of— but done it was.

Enji Todoroki did not protest. He did not even *notice*. Hawks could not decide if he was relieved or angry that Endeavor didn't appear to care about his wife's status and location, possibly because he had already gotten what he wanted from her. All that mattered was his Hero job and All Might.

Natsuo would mostly be at school but would go to the house instead of the Todoroki estate when he wanted. He did not even blink when Rei mentioned the longer drive. He merely slung an arm across her shoulders and hugged her to his side, saying he didn't mind at all.

For the times she did not join Rei and Natsuo at the house, Fuyumi had her own apartment. It was too soon for it to become Shoto's home, but he would be staying there as often as he could. It was likely he would be moved into UA's dorms before any court case began. Hawks had not known what to expect when he and Miruko approached Fuyumi, but he certainly did not expect her to want to move out as soon as she heard about Shoto's upcoming change of residence. Perhaps it helped that Shoto himself mentioned the dorms.

Hawks and Miruko did not ask any of them if they wanted to take her father to court. They did not mention it either. Endeavor had not been accused of any crimes yet, but the increasing possibility lingered on everyone's minds.

For now, Rei was out of the hospital.

Fuyumi was mostly out of the Todoroki estate.

Soon, Shoto would permanently be as well.

That meant Natsuo would have no reason to return to the home he despised.

When Endeavor went home to an empty house and understood it *was* empty, Hawks wondered if he would finally realize what his ambitions cost him. Hawks almost hoped he did, because realization might bring understanding and self-reflection at last. Deep down, he had a feeling these hopes were futile.

After twenty years of being consumed by one goal, it would take specific circumstances for Endeavor to understand, regret, and seek to change.

This would not do it.

Hawks was tired of wishing something would.

I should feel guilty for giving up on him. All Might is still the Symbol of Peace. What made Endeavor act differently hasn't happened yet. I should give him a chance. I was willing to try to redeem Villains, but I'm giving up on a fellow Hero. I should…

Hawks watched Fuyumi and Natsuo Todoroki hug their mother.

I should…

He watched Shoto solemnly promise to visit every day, only for his mother to gently tell him once a week was perfectly fine.

I should…

The Heroes that would act as Rei's guard and companions were recommended by Miruko and Tensei. Hawks did not know them personally, but as one— a young man who called himself 'Koichi' but gave no Hero name— looked torn between grinning and tearing up as he watched them interact, Hawks had a feeling she was in good hands.

I… can't.

They looked so happy. All of them. Rei was smiling. *Shoto* was smiling. There was no fear, or tension, or worried glances towards the door.

They were not free. Not yet. But they were on the way there.

Maybe that was why Hawks felt content. Maybe that was why his guilt finally eased. Endeavor had made his choices. Hawks had made choices in response. But Shoto had been the one to choose to break his silence and ask for something to change.

It wasn't worth agonizing over the what-ifs.

Things had changed, and Hawks would claim it was for the better.

There was no pleasure, or joy, or feelings of victory.

Only a feeling of acceptance, satisfaction and peace.

XXXXXXX

Dabi was on a nondescript rooftop in the shadier part of Mustafu when he received a text. His phone gave a low, brief jingle before going silent and he pulled it out of his pocket, more out of boredom than necessity. The notification on the locked screen showed part of the text before cutting off.

'Hi T. Made some progress on my project. Just wanted—'

Dabi stared at the 'Unknown' number for a time, debating whether to just delete the text. It could be from his new boss though. A message was how All For One contacted him the last time. The asshole seemed determined to see Dabi as often as possible and speak with him but he knew All For One was doing it simply to push Dabi's buttons. The meetings became even more frequent after Shigaraki was imprisoned.

They got more… *personal* too. All For One asked about Dabi's siblings and hinted at asking about his mother without actually talking about her. Of course, Dabi kept his mouth shut, even when All For One asked about Shoto's Quirk. It got far past the point where it creeped Dabi out so he avoided most of those meetings as much as he could and put some distance between himself and All For One after dropping off those captured Heroes. He did not want to end up as a Nomu too.

Still, although Dabi only joined the League for his own ends and thought their boss was a creep, he may as well check in and make sure there wasn't a new bounty on his head. He

headed to the edge of the rooftop and sat down, opening the message to view it fully.

'Hi T. Made some progress on my project. Just wanted you to know that H got your mom out of the hospital and to a new home. F has a new apartment. N is staying at school or with your mom. Working on getting S's legal guardianship changed. They're almost out.'

Dabi stared at the message in disbelief. He read it again, just to be sure, and slowly set the phone on his leg so it would not melt in his burning hands. He hissed and extinguished the blue fire, breathing deeply as more flames licked at his tongue.

There was no doubt what the message was referring to. Dabi wondered if it was a trick to draw him out, but honestly, the Heroes were not so dumb that they thought this would be the way to do it. There was no demand to meet up somewhere to talk, only an update on what happened.

Mom's out of the hospital. Fuyumi isn't living with that bastard anymore.

The flighty idiot ***actually did it****.*

Dabi glanced at the number listed as 'Unknown' and his lips twitched. He did not smile, because Hawks— if 'H' stood for Hawks and not Heroes— only got part of the job done. Mom and Dabi's sib— *Touya Todoroki's* siblings may be away from that abusive trashbag but Endeavor still walked free.

Dabi wasn't about to throw away his plans, skip home, and have a 'happy' reunion simply because his family was out of Endeavor's reach. He had a mission to complete. He would not stop until dear old Dad was ruined, exposed for the trash he was, and dead at his feet.

Dabi pocketed his phone and rose, leaving burn marks where he'd been. He jumped off the edge of the building, using a quick blast of fire to slow his fall, and landed in an alleyway below. He straightened, pulling his hood over his head, and merged into the crowd of people who either did not recognize him or did not care about another Villain in their midst.

This recent development meant nothing to Dabi.

Still, he supposed he owed the naive little angel one.

Chapter End Notes

Originally I was going to have Rei and co's move be more spread out but my plans changed. *shrugs*

Soteriophobia

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains misgendering and non-consensual kissing.

"*If I can't save this little girl… how can I save everyone?!"*

His own words— said long ago in what felt like a different life— echoed through Midoriya's head as he laid on his bed in his room in their fabricated UA. He had said those words to Overhaul while fighting to save Eri, using everything he had to not only rescue her, but keep the innocent people around their battle safe.

Yet even that day, he had not saved everyone. Mirio had lived but lost his Quirk. Sir Nighteye had *died*. Midoriya knew it was not his fault, just as Uraraka came to accept it was not hers either. Even on the best days, sometimes Heroes could not save absolutely everyone during a crisis.

Midoriya knew that.

He had accepted that.

But when had he decided that was *okay?*

So Midoriya sat on his bed in their fabricated UA dorms, hoping the door to his room would remain shut. As he sat the space— which had been filled with the All Might memorabilia of his childhood— slowly became empty. The action figures vanished from the shelves and the posters from the walls, leaving them barren as the paint began to crack.

A tap on the door was the last thing Midoriya wanted to hear, but he forced himself to raise his head and smile. "Come in."

Todoroki stepped through the door. He glanced at the decrepit walls but did not comment on them. "I have been sent to talk to you."

"I guessed." Midoriya sighed. "No offense, Shoto but why… you?"

"Pink does not know what to say and Orange would become violent." Todoroki said bluntly.

A frown pulled at Midoriya's lips. "You used their color names."

"So I did." Whi— Todoroki acknowledged. "But we should remain on topic." He stood in the center of the room and crossed his arms. "You're upset by what Hawks said. Not because it hurt, but because you fear it is true."

The bluntness was expected. The perceptive— true— analysis was not. Though Midoriya supposed Todoroki had changed from the socially-perplexed teen he had been. They all had changed. That was why he did not try to deny what Todoroki said. His friend would see right through any smiles.

"It *is* true. I… I saw Hawks as an *extra*. A 'side character'. Someone who didn't need to survive for a happy ending. His life wasn't worth much to me, just like it wasn't worth anything to the Commission." A shudder passed through Midoriya and a coldness followed that pierced his bones. "When did I decide it was okay to sacrifice some people to save others?"

"You didn't." Todoroki said firmly. "That's why you're here now."

Midoriya laughed bitterly. "Or maybe I'm here now because Hawks is the person I decided we could lose."

"That's not what I meant." Todoroki denied. He sat on the bed beside him. "Perhaps you did unconsciously see Hawks's life as something worth risking before we came here. But here and now, in this moment, you have realized that was wrong of you."

"But *would* I have changed my mind if we didn't end up here?" Midoriya asked. "Because I don't think I would have. Hawks's life wasn't important to me."

And that was the core of it. That was why he shut himself in this room and could not bear to look at Hawks. Because Heroes valued all life. They saved everyone. They did not pick a person and think 'their may die, but that could save more people.'

Midoriya could not bear the thought that he had done exactly that.

"I know you want to help." Midoriya said before Todoroki could speak again. "But I just need some time to think. Please."

He could tell his friend wanted to argue. Badly. Instead he inclined his head and rose from beside him.

"We'll be outside."

It should be a reassurance. Now, it was just a reminder that he could not hide from his decisions forever. Midoriya watched him shut the door before he laid down, rolling so he faced the empty wall. He prayed Hawks and the others— including himself— did not see his memories tonight.

He didn't want to find out the moment when he decided a single lost life was worth the results.

XXXXXXX

The school term ended and summer break began. The Summer Training Camp would be in a few weeks, in the second week of August to be precise.

Hawks and the voices waited for the other shoe to drop. It *didn't*, and things went smoothly. *Too* smoothly.

The news stopped hounding them.

Endeavor did not storm into the office and demand to know where his family was. In fact, he seemed content to only contact Hawks about their investigation through sidekicks at his Agency.

Hawks's former interns were fine, enjoying their summer break.

There was not a peep from the League or the Commission.

Hawks could not sleep for several nights. His and the voices unease multiplied until Hawks started seeing the build up to another anxiety attack. One would think seeing the signs would allow him to prevent it but his efforts were as effective as warding off flames with a wooden spoon. Hawks never realized how uncomfortable his office could make him until his chest tightened every time he tried to relax in it.

It did not help that he still waited with dread for Ingenium or the voices to grill him for more information about Kaetsu. They didn't and Hawks could not tell if they wanted to. He almost missed the time when he was bombarded by the voices' emotions. At least then he'd know what they felt towards him.

Green barely said anything to him since that day. Orange had not dragged him out and forced him to talk about things so Hawks tried not to worry. *Tried* did not mean *succeeded*. Just when he thought he might crack and have to retreat to the bathroom, Hawks's anxiety decided to give up and abandon him, leaving him detached and serene. He spent the next couple hours staring at paperwork and doing none of it, incapable of even mocking himself for doing nothing.

Mockingjay walked into the office, took one look at him, and hurried to his side. She set the tablet she was carrying on his desk.

"Hawks?"

Hawks blinked benignly at her.

"Do you want me to call Rumi or Toshinori?" she asked levelly.

He continued to stare.

Mockingjay reached for her phone. Or maybe the sedatives she had in that other pocket.

Hawks shook himself. "I can work."

He picked up a pen and tried to make sense of the document in front of him. The words danced and weaved. Hawks rubbed his eyes.

"So… tired…" Yellow groaned.

Mockingjay carefully peeled his fingers apart, forcing him to release the pen. "When did you last sleep?"

Hawks was pretty sure it was at Tensei's. He shrugged. "I'm fine. I have coffee."

Mockingjay pulled his half-empty mug out of reach before he could grab it. "You know caffeine can make your anxiety worse."

"I'm fine." Hawks repeated. He stared at the page and watched the words blur together. He stifled a growl and grabbed his mug. Mockingjay plucked it from his hands before he could drink. Hawks scowled and reached for it but she kept it out of range. "Gimme. I can't sleep so this is the next best thing."

Mockingjay dumped it down the sink. "You're running yourself ragged again." she said as she set the empty mug down. "Have your friends been keeping you up?"

Hawks paused before remembering she knew about the voices. That was going to take some getting used to. "Er, kinda? I mean, we've been…" He remembered she did not know he was Ennea. "…doing stuff at odd hours."

"I know you're Ennea."

Well, so much for that.

Hawks smiled weakly. "Could you reenact your moment of revelation? Please, I want to see your comically surprised expression."

"No." Mockingjay said blandly.

Hawks was too tired to pretend to pout. He laid his head on the desk. "How long have you known?"

"A while."

"That's specific." Hawks said, holding back a yawn.

"Hmm." She leaned over so her face was in front of his. "You didn't answer my question."

"Right." he mumbled. "We've been up doing Ennea things because we can't sleep."

"Why?"

"Don't want nightmares." Hawks muttered into his arms. "We'd have new material to work with. I… I told Tensei about Kaetsu. *Everything* about him." He shivered and shut his eyes. "I swear I just remembered. I wasn't intentionally hiding it from you or anything—"

"You don't owe me an explanation." Mockingjay interrupted.

Hawks shifted in his seat and avoided looking at her. "Aren't you angry?"

She scoffed. "Because you're talking to someone? Never. I'd be an awful friend if I threw a fit."

Hawks hummed and stared at the document with unnecessary intensity. It was… something about the budget? Maybe? "You're not going to try to dig into it to find out what happened, are you?"

"No. Though Kaetsu's file had suspicious holes even before they tried to erase it." was all she said.

Hawks knew she did not know *everything* he had done. She would not be so calm if she did.

Kaetsu would not be breathing anymore either.

Neither would the Commission.

Hawks set his pen down. "Speaking of the Commission's shadier tactics… I know this is morbid to ask, but when I die could you make sure my body is cremated? I want to make sure the Commission and League won't be able to do anything with it. In the League's case that's how they create Nomu."

"…'When'." Mockingjay echoed flatly.

"I'm not immortal. No one is." Hawks reminded her lightly.

Her eyes narrowed to slits. "Don't deflect."

"I'm not—"

"Let me guess." Mockingjay interrupted. "If someone asked, 'Where do you see yourself in ten years?' You'd say '*Dead*'."

Hawks opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again. Said nothing and dropped his gaze.

"Maybe I would." he confessed. "I've been thinking about my death a lot since I fought Amplifier."

"Yours or your future self?" Mockingjay asked.

"Both." Hawks admitted. He saw her stoic expression falter and sighed. "I'm not suicidal. I have to live."

"Because of them." Mockingjay stated. "Not for yourself."

Hawks froze. "So?" he said defensively.

"You're not going to die." Mockingjay said.

Hawks winced. "Because of my promise?"

"Because you are going to see your thirtieth birthday." Mockingjay stated. "And your fortieth, and fiftieth, and your *damn* hundredth if I have any say. You're *not* dying young."

Hawks thought about Future Tokoyami, and Aizawa, and Tsuyu and Jiro and everyone else that died before they could hit forty. He could not stop a mirthless chuckle from bursting out of him. "That's too optimistic even for me. The odds aren't in my favor, Kat."

He saw her lips press thin. Before she could reply, her tablet beeped. She picked it up and flipped through screens.

Hawks lifted his head and watched her curiously. "What's that?"

She shot him a look that told him she was not done with their previous conversation. "Bee got me a clear shot of our delivery girl. I've been putting it through facial recognition."

"Got a hit?" Hawks asked.

"Ye—" Mockingjay did a double-take. "That can't be right…" She glowered at the screen. "You've *got* to be kidding me."

"What is it?" Hawks asked urgently.

"I got an alert from Bee. Turns out Endeavor's been running facial too without sharing. He got a match a few hours ago."

"Faster than Bee?" Hawks asked, surprised.

"He's annoyed too." Mockingjay snarled as she frantically tapped the screen. "Here's our delivery girl."

She turned the tablet around, revealing the pictures on the screen.

In an instant, *everything* made sense.

The newly-emerged serial killer, why he operated in Fukuoka, his reasons for killing light-haired people with mutation-type Quirks, why he killed Amplifier…

The only reason Hawks did not have a panic attack right there was because of the 'identity' of their delivery girl.

Red's breathing hitched.

Yellow made a small, pained sound.

"*I'm going to **kill** this bastard."* Orange snarled.

Mockingjay's expression was grave. "She appears to be—"

Hawks was already out the window.

XXXXXXX

This was not how Kyoka Jiro thought her summer break would play out. She expected shopping trips, festivals, and listening to music on the beach before her class went on training trip in mid-August. She did not expect to be summoned to Endeavor's Hero Agency on a hot summer day.

She certainly did not expect to be waiting for hours in what was undeniably an interrogation room, complete with one-way glass.

When she was called, Jiro thought she was called to the Agency for clarification about… *anything* to do with her extremely short Hero career. Not being politely but firmly grabbed by the arms and hustled to an interrogation room by some sidekicks. Sidekicks who now stood by the door and watched her like they did not trust her.

This wasn't what she expected. It wasn't *at all*. That was why she sent her parents on their way after they dropped her off. She didn't think they needed to be before, but shouldn't her parents be here with her? She didn't want to ask the sidekicks standing by the door since that might make her seem guilty.

It *would* make her seem guilty, right?

One of the sidekicks— Burnin— was smiling at her, but she'd been smiling the whole time Jiro had been there, from the door to rough journey to this room. It was less an indicator that things were okay and more a permanent fixture on her face.

Jiro did not know what to think or expect. She did not have much experience with this side of the law. Her Hero education was geared more towards combat and rescue. Now here she was, not as a Hero in training or intern, but as a… suspect or witness or *what*?

Jiro tried to think rationally. She tried to keep a cool head. But the waiting without knowing *any* reason why was making that harder. That and just how uncomfortable this room was. They had not given her any water or food, the room seemed to switch between boiling hot and icy cold, she didn't know what was going on, and she didn't know what to *do*.

Was this a mistake? Was someone merely running late? Was she in trouble? She didn't think she had done anything but even if she hadn't would this go on her record? If it went on her record her Hero career was *over*. Her *life* would be over. Their society was completely unsympathetic to anyone who had any kind of mark on their record. But she hadn't done anything *wrong*.

Jiro forced herself to breathe and not fiddle with her earlobes, telling herself she was jumping to conclusions and panicking over nothing. This might merely be a standard questioning procedure that she was unprepared for. Or something.

Either way, she was waiting to be questioned by Todoroki's father. And she had no idea *why*. So Jiro ricocheted between confusion and nervousness as she resisted the urge to fiddle with her ear jacks. Now that she had time to think about it, weren't people usually interviewed at police offices and not Hero Agencies unless Quirks were involved?

Jiro shivered and rubbed her arms. The short sleeves shirt she wore was perfect for the summer weather but the room was cold again. How long had she been waiting? There was no clock and Burnin had taken her phone. That was standard procedure, right? She wished she had asked Yaoyorozu about this type of thing. Her classmate probably knew all about this type of stuff.

The door opened and Endeavor himself walked in. He made for an intimidating figure, practically filling the doorway as he entered. Was he always so tall? And angry? Jiro's sense of wrongness increased.

"Where were you Wednesday two weeks ago at 10:36 a.m.?" Endeavor demanded.

Jiro jumped, not expecting him to start with a question. She tried to remember the day he was talking about— had he not said the date on purpose?— and came up blank.

"I was in class?" She winced as it came out as a question.

"Were you?" Endeavor asked. Now he appeared too calm. Almost neutral. That disturbed her all the more. He flipped open the file he held and set it on the table in front of her, revealing a picture. "Then who is this?"

Jiro looked at the grainy image and could not believe what she saw. It was a bit difficult to make out the person on the grainy image and much of her face was hidden under a cap, but the markings beneath her white eyes— like a *Nomu's* eyes— were undeniable. It was her but… older? The unflattering uniform hid her figure, but the woman's facial features were a bit less girlish than Jiro's, as if someone had used a program to age her up a few years. But it was *her*. If she looked at the ears, she could see long earlobes tucked up into the cap.

She glanced uncertainly at Endeavor. "What is this?"

"That is what we want to know." Endeavor said coolly. He leaned forward and Jiro could feel the heat from his flames. "So I ask again: where were you Wednesday?"

Jiro was not a crier. She was not the most confident girl, but she rolled her eyes at those that claimed teenagers were overly emotional. But in this moment, she wanted nothing more than to burst into tears, out of confusion and stress more than anything.

What was going on? What Wednesday was he talking about? What had the woman who looked like her *done*? Why was she in trouble? Was she in trouble? Should she ask? Should she not? What would make her seem innocent and what would make her seem more like a suspect? Why was Endeavor looking at her like he thought she was already guilty?

"I was at school." she repeated shakily.

Although it did not come out as a question this time, she could not deny she sounded as close to tears as she felt. She could feel Endeavor's flames. He was too close, and they made her skin prickle and sting. Any closer and she wondered if she'd burst into flames too. She wished the room was cold again, not boiling hot. She was sweating, which probably made her look even more guilty than she already did.

Endeavor's eyes— had they always been such an unforgiving blue?— narrowed.

Burnin put a hand to her ear— a communicator?— and frowned. "Sir—"

The door abruptly opened with a screech of abused metal and the Winged Hero Hawks strolled in. Behind him came a grim-looking Detective Tsukauchi.

"Sorry we're late!" Hawks said cheerfully. He grabbed a chair and pulled it so it was on the side adjacent to Jiro instead of across from her before sitting down in it. He waved. "Hi, younger Jiro! Nice to meet you. I'm calling you younger Jiro because I called your parents. They're on their way back."

Jiro sometimes thought people were exaggerating when they said the arrival of certain Heroes made all their fear vanish. In that moment, she understood their sentiment completely and felt bad for ever doubting those who claimed a Hero could make them feel safe with just their appearance alone.

Her breathing evened out as the air around her grew cooler. Had the heat been her imagination? It must have been, because she thought she caught a glimpse of frost on Hawks's feathers. It was gone when she blinked.

Jiro did not know Hawks personally in any way, but she had seen the news. This Hero would be her teacher soon. She wished they had met under different circumstances. *Any* other circumstances at all would be preferable.

Hawks turned his bright smile to Endeavor. "Enji, I know you're not used to teaming up but you usually tell your Agency-partner when you're talking to someone. Especially when it's *their* investigation."

Hawks's tone was teasing and chipper but there was something underneath it that made the hair on Jiro's nape prickle. Something… not quite *dangerous*, but suggesting patience had been worn thin. It reminded her of Present Mic during the rare times the class managed to push him too far.

"I planned to inform you once concrete evidence was acquired." Endeavor said.

His expression remained neutral, but there was a thinness to his lips like he'd eaten a lemon. He leaned forward and despite herself, Jiro tensed. Hawks turned back to Jiro and propped his elbow on the table, leaning on his hand. His wings flared out a little and almost hit Endeavor. In any other circumstance, Jiro might have giggled. Instead she watched him carefully. His new position almost seemed deliberate.

"So." Hawks said cheerfully. "You okay or do I need to bring out the power point about interrogating minors without their parents present?"

Jiro heard Endeavor's jaw clench. "She is a Hero—"

"She is a fifteen year-old first-year student who hasn't even gotten her provisional Hero license yet." Hawks interrupted pleasantly. "She also doesn't need any stupidity messing up

her record." His smile— bright, fierce, and almost *feral*— softened to something gentler as he kept his eyes on Jiro. "Did anyone explain what's going on?"

Jiro mutely shook her head.

"We think a Villain may have used your appearance." Hawks explained patiently.

Jiro's eyes widened. "Why me?" she blurted.

"It might be because you're from the infamous Class 1-A." Hawks said. His voice remained light, but his golden eyes were hard. Unlike with Endeavor, she could tell his anger was not at her.

"The League?" Jiro whispered. Her stomach twisted into knots. What if the Villain did it again— more perfectly this time— and tricked her parents or friends?

Hawks shrugged. "Possibly but probably not. No League member has been known to—"

"The Villain dropped off a suspicious package at a Hero Agency." Endeavor interjected.

"*My* Agency." Hawks said with the same pleasantry Jiro's mom used when she was ready to throw someone out of her house. He glanced down at the file and shut it. "You don't need to see what she delivered."

"She should." Endeavor disagreed. "Since the Villain may be... using her identity—" He spoke as if he doubted that was the case. "—for a reason."

Hawks's smile vanished completely. "*No*, she does not. I'm not giving a teenager nightmares."

They looked at each other and the air between them practically crackled with tension. Endeavor was glaring, while Hawks merely stared at him with an aura of dangerous politeness. The sidekicks near the door did not react, except Burnin's smile had shrunk slightly. Whether her shrinking grin was out of confusion or unease, Jiro could not tell. Jiro herself had no idea how to react. Was this some 'good cop', 'bad cop' deal like in those movies her father loved to watch?

"It may trigger a memory." Endeavor argued.

"She clearly wasn't the delivery girl." Hawks denied instantly. "Look at the date and time. She was at school. One call to her teacher will confirm that." His smile was back as if it had never been gone, still with that feral edge. "Plus that's why I brought Tsukauchi." He turned to Jiro. "He has a lie detector Quirk. We usually don't need him when interviewing potential witnesses but some people like to be suspicious."

His tone sounded teasing but Jiro sensed it was anything but. This was so weird. From what Midoriya said, Hawks was an Endeavor fan, right? Had something happened or was their friendliness— from Hawks, mostly— just for Hero solidarity?

Tsukauchi sat across from Jiro and smiled at her. "We can wait for your parents to arrive if you want."

Jiro swallowed and shook her head. She was a Hero in training so she should act independently. ""N-No. You can ask questions now."

Tsukauchi took her hand. His hand was warm. Was the contact necessary because of how his Quirk worked or did he do it to provide support?

"Let's start with the basics. What is your name?" he asked.

Now *this* was what Jiro expected. "Kyoka Jiro."

"Age?"

"Fifteen."

"Birthday?"

"August 1st."

"Your birthday's in a couple weeks." Tsukauchi commented. "Happy almost birthday. Do you have any plans?" He released her hand and raised both of his. "You don't have to answer that one."

He said it so seriously— like that freedom was the most important thing in the world— that it was oddly comical. Hawks gave an undignified snort.

Jiro struggled not to smile as well. She fiddled with her earlobes. "Um. I'm going to have a party with a couple of my classmates Kaminari and Yaoyorozu— uh, Chargebolt and Creati."

Hawks abruptly turned his head away from her. She thought she saw his shoulders shudder. When she glanced at him, he was smiling again.

"Sounds fun." Tsukauchi commented. He took her hand again. "Quirk?"

"Earphone Jack."

"Blood Type?"

"A."

Tsukauchi grew solemn. "Where were you last Wednesday?"

"In class." Jiro said calmly.

"Can others verify you were there?"

She thought of Yaoyorozu and Kaminari. And Midoriya and Koda and the rest of her classmates. And Aizawa, Present Mic, and the other teachers. "Yes."

Tsukauchi let go of her hand again. "And that settles that. We'll call them just for consistency's sake." He rose from his seat. Hawks did as well, and gestured to Jiro to do the same. Tsukauchi adjusted his hat and looked to Endeavor. "I cannot be everywhere, but I

have offered my services to help Hawks in this investigation. We all would like this case to be closed quickly."

"Of course." Endeavor said.

Now he sounded merely annoyed. It was perfectly reasonable for him to be, right? He had a plan, and Hawks and Tsukauchi were unexpected, apparently.

So why did Jiro feel nervous?

Hawks's golden eyes flicked to her and he abruptly stepped to her side and opened the door. He gestured out. "After you. Your parents should be here by now."

Jiro nodded mutely and walked between Endeavor's sidekicks and out into the hall. As she passed through the doorframe she noticed how bent the metal lock was, almost as if it had physically been forced open. Before she could think more of it, Tsukauchi and Hawks followed. She glanced back and saw the latter's wings were slightly open, just enough to fill the door and stop her from seeing Endeavor.

And— she comprehended abruptly— stopping Endeavor from seeing *her*.

She finally pieced together what had been so strange about Hawks's movements. He'd been intentionally shifting his body in response to Endeavor. But why would the Number Three Hero see the need to put himself between her and the Number Two Hero?

"Hawks." Endeavor said from within the room. "A word."

Hawks's smile did not fade. "Hey, Tsukauchi? Can you—"

"Burnin, show her to the front desk." Endeavor ordered. "Bandage, escort the detective to his car."

The mummy-looking sidekick and Burnin pushed past Hawks. He guided Tsukauchi away while Burnin put a hand on Jiro's shoulder. She stiffened but did not push it off.

"This way, kid." Burnin said with her never-ending grin.

It wasn't soothing like Hawks' or All Might's. It was too wild. Jiro let Burnin guide her along and glanced back to see Endeavor grab Hawks arm and pull him down a hall. Her stomach twisted— in more ways than one— and she looked to Burnin.

"I… have to go to the bathroom." she admitted in a mumble.

Burnin snorted. "Not surprising. You were in there how many hours?"

Jiro reached for her pocket only to remember she did not have her phone.

Burnin laughed at her expression. "It's four thirty."

It had been the morning when Jiro came into the Agency. Her stomach twinged and she realized how hungry she was. At least it was not growling.

"This will be good practice for when you're out in the real world." Burnin commented as she led Jiro down a side hall. "Sometimes Heroes don't have time for food or bathroom breaks."

She grinned knowingly. It seemed mocking, but Jiro was sure it was her own perception that made it look that way. She had a bad day and Burnin did not mean to embarrass her when she was already so *humiliated* but her cheeks turned red.

Jiro silently headed into the women's room. To her surprise, Burnin did not follow her inside. Jiro heard her talking on her communicator as the door shut. Jiro entered a stall and shut it securely behind her. That done, she leaned against the door and focused on breathing.

Her skin felt sticky and clammy, and a glance at her shirt showed that yes, she had sweated as much as she thought. Jiro stared at the stains that went down her sides and bit her lip, swallowing the childish urge to cry. She tugged at her shirt but was forced to give up on trying to hide the humiliating spots.

Jiro's vision blurred as frustrated tears stung her eyes and she almost punched the stall door, only stopping when she realized Endeavor would not appreciate property damage. She dragged her hands down her face to compose herself and exited the stall, washing her face with cool water. That done, she peeked outside.

Burnin was not there.

Jiro dithered outside of the door and glanced around self-consciously. She had not been in there long but Burnin seemed to have left. Did she get called away? Did she mean for Jiro to wait here?

The stupid urge to cry was back again and Jiro gritted her teeth. She was *not* a crier. She was just tired and had a headache and her throat felt drier than the desert from sitting in that room all day. She wanted to *go home*.

Jiro turned left and headed towards what she hoped was the lobby. Endeavor's Agency was not a maze, but it was not the most stranger-friendly either. Burnin had been too busy pushing her along for her to recognize the layout when she came in, and before she knew it, Jiro was hopelessly lost. She heard the sound of footsteps and grimaced, resigning herself to facing more sidekicks who would likely be annoyed to find her somewhere she was not supposed to be. And she did not even have her phone.

Jiro straightened her shoulders and hoped she did not look as upset as she felt. She walked blindly down the hall, and another one, and another, as she fruitlessly tried to figure out where to go. Instead she found herself in more and more unfamiliar places, trying not to feel like a child who had lost her parents in a huge mall. The desire to cry grew stronger but she swallowed it.

She was a Hero and Heroes did not cry—

"What are you doing here?"

Jiro jumped and whirled around to see Burnin. The sidekick had her hands on her hips and her smile was gone, replaced by an exasperated look.

"I leave for a sec and find you gone." she lectured. "What gives?"

"I-I..." Jiro stammered. She heard light footsteps behind her. "You weren't outside and I got..." She glanced backwards uneasily. Relief spread through her when she saw Hawks was there. "...lost."

She took in Hawks's appearance and her relief was blown out like a candle.

Hawks had strange darkened patches on his costume.

They looked like burn marks.

"Jeez, Burnin. You should know better." Hawks laughed. If Jiro did not see him a few minutes ago, she would never have noticed the hard edge to it. "Did you really expect her to stay put?"

"Eh. I guess not." Burnin said with a shrug. She glanced at Hawks and Jiro saw her gaze rest on his burned costume. "Looks like Endeavor got a little mad."

Hawks's cheer vanished in a heartbeat. "Yeah." he said flatly.

Burnin huffed. "What'd you do to piss him off?"

Jiro could only stare in disbelief.

Hawks remained unmoved. "I exist, I guess."

Burnin cackled in genuine amusement. It made Jiro uncomfortable. Did she not see the burn marks? No, she obviously had. Did she think it was a funny thing between two Pro Heroes then?

"Jiro and I can find our way to the door, I think." Hawks continued. He glanced at her and abruptly removed his coat, revealing a halter top underneath. He held the jacket out to her. "You look cold."

Jiro wanted to protest that she wasn't before she remembered the stains again. She took the coat with a mumbled thanks and tried not to stare at the bruises on Hawks's exposed arms and back. Some injuries looked old, but others were undeniably fresh.

One of them matched the burn on his costume's sleeve.

It was *hand shaped*.

Jiro averted her gaze. The coat was too big and kind of warm in the heat but she did not mind at all. It was comforting, like a blanket or her favorite sweater.

Despite Hawks's claim that they would be fine, Burnin stayed with them to the front door of the Agency. A few sidekicks stared at them, but they seemed to be looking at Hawks more than Jiro, much to her relief. Hawks responded to their stares with smiles and friendly waves, even to the ones that were obviously ogling him, practically drooling over his exposed skin.

Jiro wondered how he could bear the attention. She also wondered how no one questioned the hand-shaped burn on his shoulder and throat. Jiro glanced at the burn marks on the coat she had borrowed and swallowed a retch. She focused on Hawks's back instead, noting the strange, evenly-spaced dots down his spine. Were those scars or some type of markings? They looked too perfectly placed to be accidental injuries…

They got outside, and Jiro saw her parents' car down the road. Even from a distance she saw her mother's worried expression. She glanced down at the borrowed coat she wore and noticed her fingers were white.

"You can keep that if you want." Hawks told her. He grinned. "I have another—"

"He hurt you." Jiro whispered.

Hawks went still, his smile vanishing. A visible shudder passed through him and his skin went pale. He did not look angry at her accusation. He just looked sad.

"Endeavor's hand was just a bit hot when he grabbed my arm but I'm okay. Did he hurt you?" He asked quietly.

He was asking *her*? Though after the day she had, she could maybe see why.

"I'm fine." She mumbled. "They just left me in the room for a while." She did not mention the rapidly changing temperature and lack of water and food, which in hindsight might have been intentional to make her uncomfortable.

"They shouldn't have." Hawks said lowly."You had a rough day. You're—" He paused and closed his eyes. "You're a Hero *in training*. You weren't prepared for any of this." He opened his eyes again and caught her with a stern golden glare. "Listen, I know legal stuff isn't covered much until second year, but what they did was *wrong*. *Technically* legal, but frowned upon. You don't leave a minor in an interrogation room like that. Especially not without their parents. Pass that info on to your classmates if you can. Or maybe I should talk to…" He trailed off and *bowed to Jiro*. "I'm sorry I didn't catch what Endeavor was doing sooner. If there are any follow ups, *my* Agency will contact you."

The way he said it— low and haunted— made her wonder if he had been late to help someone before… and what had happened to those he failed to save.

Suddenly, looking up the history and procedures on how Hero Agencies treated those brought in for questioning seemed like a good summer project.

Jiro gripped Hawks's coat securely around her. "Thank you." she said. "I'll pass on your advice."

Hawks smiled. "You're a good kid, Jiro. You'll be a great Hero someday."

He flew away, leaving her with her parents and his coat.

They took her home, asking concerned questions, but all she said was there was a misunderstanding that Hawks helped clear up.

She took a shower and changed into fresh clothes.

She drank water and ate food.

She assured her parents that she was fine and quickly retreated to her room.

There she listened to music to calm down until she no longer heard her heartbeat pounding in her ears.

Hawks's burnt coat was placed in the back of her closet.

Not as a memento, but a reminder.

She would not forget what happened today.

XXXXXXX

As soon as he landed in his office, Hawks's legs buckled and he leaned against the wall, sliding down it to sit on the floor with his knees bent. His shoulders shook before his wings pressed close around him.

"We're okay." he breathed. "He doesn't know about them yet." He put his head in his hands. "We're okay. We're o-okay."

They were *not* okay.

Red and Yellow were crying.

Pink and Green— who had finally come out of hiding— were close to tears.

Orange was swearing.

Silver and Purple were outraged, ranting about every procedure Endeavor had broken by keeping a fifteen year-old in an interrogation room for half a day.

Only White was silent, like the calm eye to a storm. His lack of surprise should be disturbing, but Hawks could only muster exhausted resignation. He heard Mockingjay come in but did not raise his head from his hands.

You okay, Red? Yellow?

"No."

Hawks could not tell which one spoke.

Wanna talk?

He heard someone sniffle. *"She's so **young**."*

"*I can't believe Kaetsu recreated her fucking Nomu!"* Orange bellowed.

Yellow's presence flickered like a page going blank and Red's hiccups became dead silent as shock took over. Something in Hawks's head *cracked* and he lurched in place, curling up as agony lanced through his head.

"*What the **hell**, Orange?"* Pink snapped but her anger was lost in a tsunami of fear.

"*Calm down."* Purple said, voice strained with panic. *"Everyone **calm down!**"*

Hawks could not tell if he tried to use his Quirk or not. If he did, it failed miserably as his breathing grew faster and faster. There were hands on his bare shoulders and he recoiled, hitting the wall in his haste to scramble backwards.

The woman in front of him backed away. She kept her hands visible but that meant little in a world of Quirks. Lips moved but Hawks heard nothing but static. Was she a new handler? She wore black like lots of them did. She did not look mad but she must be because Hawks flinched and that was bad and he didn't mean to be bad—

He saw grey eyes and brown hair, neatly twisted into a braid.

Mockingjay. It was *Katniss*.

"Fine." he grunted before she could speak. "Give me a sec."

Hawks pressed his hands over his eyes, grinding his palms into his closed eyelids as much as he could without causing himself physical damage. *Let's all calm down. **Think.** Let's figure out what happened—*

"Do not try to deny it." Purple interrupted. *"We **know** what happened."* His voice became flat. *"Kaetsu is the serial killer. He created a Nomu Jiro like from our past. He killed Amplifier for hurting Hawks and had her deliver the head here."*

Stay calm, Hawks ordered himself. *Things to do have to plan **stay calm**.*

If the voices heard his panicked thoughts, they did not mention it.

"Will he target past Jiro?" Yellow asked frantically.

Hawks took a shuddering breath, slammed the lid down on his emotions, and shook his head. *No. He probably does not realize what his creation is based on. He gets the fear, not the reason why people fear it. Red, what do you think?*

Red was still reeling.

Red? Re— Hawks hesitated. *Momo?*

No response.

…Momo Yaoyorozu?

She startled. *"Huh? I-I—"*

Hawks looked down and his hands were covered in blood. Sparks flared from the broken wires hanging above him in the desolate hallway, illuminating the area just enough for him to catch sight of the Nomu laying against the opposite wall. Her head lay beside her slumped body, positioned like a macabre prop at her hip where it had fallen. The white eyes that stared accusingly at her were dull in death, one of her earphone jacks severed from—

"***Calm down.***" Purple ordered.

False serenity swept through them and they *breathed.*

"*Yes.*" Red confirmed shakily. *"That is my identity. How did you figure it out?"*

Jiro mentioned Kaminari and Yaoyorozu. Chargebolt and Creati. It just… clicked.

"*That just leaves you, Orange"* Yellow said in a pathetic imitation of his usual joking tone. *"Congrats, you're the last mysterious identity."*

"Okay, ***think****."* Purple interjected. *"How did he create an evil kinda-Nomu future Jiro?"*

"This sounds like something out of a comic book." Yellow said faintly.

"Would you take this ***seriously****?"* Purple snapped.

Yellow recoiled.

"...My apologies." Purple murmured. *"Back on topic."* He braced himself. *"Obviously—"*

"His Quirk created her from ***my*** *fear."* Red said quietly. Her voice was so soft Hawks could barely hear her.

"He can create a ***person****?"* Yellow demanded.

"Twice can do that too." Pink reminded them. *"Memories and morality included."*

"This… illusion obviously is not that independent." Purple noted. *"Based on what Kaetsu did while… controlling Gold, he likely has to tell…* ***it*** *what to do. It is* ***not*** *Jiro. It's not even a clone of her."*

"It's a Nightmare." White murmured. *"Red's greatest fear made tangible."*

"He created a Nomu from ***nothing****."* Pink realized shakily. *"Worse, he made it look human except for the eyes. Imagine if All For One took that Quirk. He wouldn't need to capture Heroes. He could just find someone with the right fear and create Nomu from that."*

Hawks had not even considered that. Now that the idea was out there, he did not *want* to. Not with everything else today had forced him to realize was happening.

Endeavor knew Hawks was investigating him, had taken issue with that, and was becoming more and more of a problem.

The Commission still lurked, eager to bring Hawks to heel or kill him.

All For One and the League of Villains were still out there, plotting unknown schemes.

The Meta Liberation Army was active as well, and soon Miruko might be infiltrating it. She might *already have* if her evasiveness was an indicator.

Kaetsu was killing people and possibly targeting Hawks.

They were all biding their time, waiting for the right moment to strike.

It wouldn't take long for someone to make a move. Things were going to head in a bad direction soon.

It was not a question of if anymore, but *when*.

Terror tore through them like a tsunami and Hawks's vision turned grey. When it returned, he was laying on the couch in his office. Mockingjay was nowhere to be found.

He had drifted. *Again*.

Hawks blinked rapidly and wiped angrily at his eyes.

"*It's okay to cr—"* White began.

No.

White apparently decided not to touch that issue for now and dropped it. *"What do we do now?"*

"*We're trying to cover too many fronts. We need to eliminate one of the threats."* Orange said instantly.

"*Shoto and his family already away from Endeavor."* Pink said optimistically.

"*So Endeavor's being a hindering asshole to Hawks instead."* Orange reminded her harshly. His disgust rankled at Hawks. *"But we can't legally do anything about that."*

"*Should we… try to focus on the League?"* Yellow asked hesitantly. *"We know where the Nomu factory is and Aizawa believes us."*

"*We still can't send a raid team of Heroes there without evidence."* Silver argued.

"*So should we **get** evidence?"*

"*With the Commission and Kaetsu on our asses and them already believing we're a Nomu?"* Orange scoffed. *"Yeah,* ***great*** *idea."*

"We should try to draw Kaetsu out."

It was Green who spoke, for the first time since he'd retreated. His tone was unnaturally calm, and Hawks wondered if that was because of Purple's influence or not. His own heartbeat spiked and his palms went sweaty but he kept silent, because if Green thought that was a good idea, he'd explain why.

"*Kaetsu* ***may*** *be working with the Commission but I find that unlikely since he killed Amplifier."* Green continued levelly. *"He's the one singular enemy we have. He's also a complete wild card so we cannot predict him. And… his Quirk is too dangerous to let him continue acting."*

"*Scared to see what fear he'd create of yours, Deku?"* Orange asked. His tone was snide, but Hawks could feel the unease under his rudeness. He seemed to shake himself. *"As for drawing him out? Just say Hawks is dating someone."*

"Orange, that is highly inappropriate." Silver said tersely.

"*Wha—?"*

It's a valid strategy, Hawks interjected out of dutiful obligation as he ignored his pounding heart. *But Kaetsu would probably just shoot them if he thinks they're a threat to—*

He remembered Muscular's abrupt and gory death. And Tenya's fallen sidekick, Royale. The one who Hawks waved to when he arrived to help Shigaraki's escort.

"Oh shit." Yellow breathed.

Hawks rubbed his cold, bare arms. Where was his coa– Oh right, he'd given it to Jiro.

He distracted himself by looking for Mockingjay. It was strange for her to have left him like that unless something had come up. He checked his phone and saw a brief text indicating that was indeed the case. Apparently he had fallen asleep and there was a minor emergency. Nothing too bad, *don't worry*.

Hawks nodded to himself at the logical explanation, breathing in and out, but his throat closed up. The walls of the office were closing in and the grey static of his drifting was getting louder, muffling the voices just enough that he could only catch the occasional word.

"*Kaetsu— Kaetsu— Kaetsu—"*

The name forced itself into Hawks's mind like an ice-pick through his brain, forcing itself deeper and deeper until he could think of nothing else.

The safe little bubble of denial Hawks clung to burst into vapor and his skin went cold and clammy.

Kaetsu was out of prison.

He was killing people.

He created Red's fear.

He knew about Red's fear and connected it to Hawks.

He was free and after Hawks and the Commission *knew* but they didn't give a damn.

Kaetsu was *stalking him again*.

Too close. The walls were too close. He couldn't *breathe*.

He needed air.

Hawks dove out the window and took to the cloudy grey sky. Was it daytime? What happened to night? Had it been night yet?

Where was he?

He was not sure where he was headed but he did not go far before a strange numbness went down his spine and he found himself falling.

Hawks watched the floor of a dirty alleyway approach in vague befuddlement, barely hearing the voices screaming in his ears.

At the last second, his consciousness *lurched*, and Pink activated her Quirk.

They stopped plummeting right before Hawks's body hit the ground, beginning to float upward. Pink hastily grabbed a feather and snapped it, causing them to fall down the remaining few inches with much less force than they would have.

Once they were no longer going to go splat, Pink immediately gave control back.

Hawks didn't move. He lay in the grime of the alleyway and stared up at the sky, unable to draw in enough air. His chest felt too heavy, like his ribs were trying to crush his lungs and heart, and his back felt disturbingly light.

Where were his wings? He could not feel them anymore. Were they gone again?
Was *that* why he fell?

Hawks clawed at his back and felt feathers, but it was like his wings were numb. Even as beads of blood stained his fingertips, he felt nothing. They were useless. Useless dead weight just like him.

Feathers fell from his back, floating miserably to the dirty floor and piling around him like a growing pool of blood. He kept clawing and tearing with both his hands and his mind, ripping more and more feathers away until he felt his fingers scraping bone.

The voices began shouting again. Or maybe they never stopped. Their voices were muffled and distorted like a bad radio signal, covered with static that made it impossible to hear what they were trying to say. Hawks listened distantly to them, too focused on trying to breathe to focus on their unintelligible words.

Hawks could not move.

He could not—

Hawks shoved the voices inside their dorm and slammed the mental door shut. There were no voices in there. He had no one there except himself. No one to rely on except himself—

Hawks's mind finally understood what it had been trying to deny.

He's here.

Move.

Hawks lurched to his feet like a reanimated corpse, stumbling and shuffling as he leaned heavily against the wall. For how slowly he staggered, he may as well not have legs at all. All his speed, power, and skill was gone, leaving a wide-eyed, trembling, useless wreck in his place. He was wingless and useless and stupid and helpless and he needed help he needed someone *please—*

He fumbled with his phone, blindly scrolling, and called the first number he touched.

They answered after three rings.

"*Hello, Hawks."* Toshinori greeted cheerfully. *"How are you this fine day?"*

Hawks tried to speak. All that came out was a low, frightened whimper, like a scared child or injured animal.

"*Hawks? What's wrong?"* Toshinori asked frantically, his former cheer forgotten.

Hawks tried to tell him, but all that came out was a sob. He clapped a hand over his mouth and slid down the alley wall, pressing himself against it out of a naive hope that he could vanish into it.

Hawks heard the sound of pounding footsteps from through the phone. *"Where are you?"*

Toshinori's voice sounded different. Louder, less gravelly.

It was too close to All Might's.

All Might's Quirk wouldn't fail him. All Might wouldn't fall into the dirt like an incompetent wretch. All Might wouldn't have a panic attack. All Might wouldn't be afraid. All Might wouldn't seek comfort or help. All Might wouldn't beg for another Hero to come save him—

Why did I call him he'll tell All Might I can't let All Might know I'm weak bad pathetic shouldn't be a Hero I'm a nothing nothing NOTHING—

Hawks did *not* cry. He did not let his eyes do more than sting as his chest heaved and he gripped the phone so tightly his fingers ached.

"*Hawks, talk to me."* Toshinori pleaded. *"Where are you?"*

Something moved in the corner of Hawks's eye. He did not need to turn to see who it was. His fear tore past the breaking point, leaving a sense of apathetic acceptance, and he found his voice.

"I'm sorry."

The phone slipped from Hawks's numb fingers and clattered to the alley floor. He heard Toshinori's voice shouting, begging Hawks to tell him where he was. Hawks did not reply. He curled up and pressed himself against the alley wall like an abused animal tried to hide in its cage.

Norito Kaetsu crouched in front of him with a huge smile on his face. If it got any bigger the skin would split at the center of his lips. Years in prison had done nothing to diminish his intimidating stature. He was as tall, broad, and muscular as Hawks remembered from four years ago. His hair was still a tousled white and his eyes were still an acidic, unnerving green. He was so aesthetically unaffected by his time in jail that Hawks had to wonder if he had truly been there at all.

Maybe it was just another Commission lie.

It didn't matter at this point.

Hawks did not move as Kaetsu yanked him upward by his arm, grabbed his face in ice-cold hands, and kissed him.

Hawks's arms twitched but fell limply to his sides without bothering to try to shove his former handler away. All the self-defense techniques he knew drifted around his head like smoke in a breeze, observable but unable to be grasped. He wasn't being controlled but he wasn't fighting back even though he could. He deserved this.

Don't drift, Hawks thought, looking past Kaetsu and trying to ignore what he was doing. *Don't drift.*

Kaetsu pulled back and Hawks caught a glimpse of his mouth. His tongue was black.

Trigger. He was using some type of Trigger, the Quirk-enhancing drug.

A shudder passed through Hawks and Kaetsu gave a breathy laugh. He grasped Hawks's face, thumbs pressing into his cheeks just hard enough to be painful, and pressed his face into Hawks's hair, breathing in deeply.

"My Angel. Oh, I missed you *so much*."

Lips pressed against Hawks's again. That was fine. He could handle this. He had been trained in infiltration and seduction so if he was being kissed it was fine because that meant it was training. Wait no, it was a *mission* not training because he was a Pro Hero now and an adult and this was *fine*.

Hawks's attempts at denial failed him and his vision began to grow grey. He couldn't panic. He *couldn't* drift. If he did then when he woke up—

"I'm so happy to see you again!" Kaetsu sniffled. "I wanted to see you when I was released but I knew our meeting needed to be *perfect*." He smiled and cupped Hawks's cheeks with his too-cold hands. "Did you have fun with your investigation?" His smile vanished. "It took you long enough to realize it was me. I even killed that evil Villain for threatening you. I left all those hints, just for you, but then I had to kill more people because you didn't notice. You're so *stupid*. Look at how many people died because of you."

He was expecting a response. Hawks forced himself to provide.

"I'm sorry." he choked.

Kaetsu chuckled like Hawks had told him the funniest joke. "No you're not." Fingers brushed Hawks's hair out of his face with deceptive gentleness. "But you *will* be."

Hawks dutifully remained locked in place and Kaetsu smiled widely, showing too many teeth. He paused and did a double-take, glancing down at Hawks's burnt arm as though he had just noticed the injury. His stroking fingers became nails as he dragged them down Hawks's temple and cheek. Hawks tried to shrink away from him but he did not let go even as his expression twisted with pure hatred. He grabbed Hawks's arm, right over the mark Endeavor left, and squeezed hard enough that it would definitely bruise. Hawks bit his lip but did not make a sound even as the vice-like grip seemed to scrape along his bone.

"You let him *hurt* you." Kaetsu accused.

The hand that had been grabbing Hawks's arm latched onto his hair. He squeezed his eyes shut as Kaetsu held him in place, leaning in. His breath smelled like rotting flesh and blood.

"No one gets to touch you but *me*. *Me!* Does our bond mean *nothing*, you unfaithful *bitch?!*"

Hawks's throat hurt from forcing himself not to cry. "I'm sor—"

Kaetsu grabbed him by the throat and gave him a shake. "Don't speak to me, *traitor*." he snarled. "I know what you did! How you *betrayed* us. Did you learn nothing from my lessons? Remedial courses are too good for you, but you're damn well on your way to them."

Hawks didn't cry but his breathing was too fast, his chest heaving as he made sounds too close to sobs. Kaetsu's furious expression softened and his embrace was unnervingly gentle.

"Shh." Kaetsu soothed. "Shh, Angel. I didn't mean it. I'm not going to give you to the Commission, okay? As long as you're good, you get to stay with me. My Quirk will make you right again."

Hawks stopped breathing. The air clogged his throat like he'd swallowed a stone and his heart felt like it was going to burst.

"But I don't need to use it just yet, right?" Kaetsu asked in a gentle coo, like Hawks was a misbehaving pet. "You'll listen to me all on your own, won't you?"

To an outsider he would sound teasing but Hawks heard the threat in his low tone. He forced his head to move, indicating that no, that was not necessary, even as his mind began working again. He couldn't feel the voices but they were still there. Kaetsu did not seem to have noticed them, but that could change very quickly.

He needed to move.

Move.

Move!

MOVE!

Hawks shoved Kaetsu back and ran. His steps were uncoordinated and slow— like he was concussed or drunk— and he stumbled into the wall, hitting it with enough force that pain lanced up his shoulder. But he did not stop. He did not falter. It was daytime and there was a busy street with people walking by *right there*.

His wings were small red stumps on his back and his coat was gone but surely someone would recognize him and at least approach him and maybe then the attention would delay Kaetsu. He needed help. It was selfish and cowardly and pathetic and unheroic to seek protection from those he was supposed to protect but he *needed help*.

A middle-aged couple was standing near the edge of the alley. Hawks hobbled towards them and they must have heard him because they stopped and turned. They *turned*. They could *see* him. There were no gasps of recognition, only confusion, and Hawks had to wonder if he was truly so unrecognizable without his wings and coat that they did not see who he was. He stumbled determinedly toward them and opened his mouth.

Help me.

Kaetsu deftly caught him by the arm and pulled him into what would appear to be a supportive hold, one arm around his shoulders while the other lay over his stomach. The larger man's body *conveniently* covered the telltale, tattered remains of Hawks's wings. His grip was tight in warning, just hard enough to be painful and let Hawks know any more pressure would break a bone. Hawks went still and Kaetsu smiled apologetically at the couple.

"I'm so sorry about my fiancee." Kaetsu apologized. "I hope she did not startle you. She had a little too much to drink." He shot Hawks a fond, exasperated look and chuckled wryly.

The couple's expressions shifted from confusion to amusement.

"We've all been there." the man said, a fatherly laugh in his voice. "Do you need a ride home?"

Hawks tried to speak but his throat and head were filled with cotton and he could only manage an incomprehensible mumble. The couple's amusement became more pronounced.

"No, no. I've got her." Kaetsu said with a grateful smile. "Thank you for the offer."

"Make sure she has enough water and gets some sleep." the woman advised.

"I will." Kaetsu promised.

The couple walked away. The other passerby did not give Hawks and Kaetsu another glance. Kaetsu kept smiling but his grip got tighter and tighter until Hawks felt the bones in his arm creak. Kaetsu kept on smiling, but his acid green eyes were cold. The warning was clear.

Don't. Do that. Again.

Hawks didn't.

The couple stuck their heads together as they walked and chuckled at his predicament like it was a funny story they would tell to their friends. Other bystanders walked busily by. Ten, twenty, thirty people went right by Hawks and Kaetsu and not a single person gave them more than a glance.

Hawks didn't understand how they couldn't *see*. Or could they see, but they did not care? The thought was enough to send a hollow numbness through Hawks, leaving him empty and cold. His fear of resisting Kaetsu warred with his fear of going with his handler and despite himself, Hawks struggled.

His attempts were as pathetic as a bird trying to break free of a wolf's claws, but someone should *notice*. They should notice every time he lurched to try to get away, every time he made soft, pleading sounds, every time his shoulders shook with terror.

If they did, they did not act.

It was *obvious* he was afraid. It was obvious he did not want to go with Kaetsu. It *had* to be obvious.

So why wasn't anyone doing anything?

Hawks knew why. It was because he was stumbling like a drunk. Because Kaetsu had a face many would find trustworthy just because he looked conventionally handsome. Because these people were just civilians. Because normal people were not supposed to interfere when a crime happened right in front of them. Because Heroes were expected to be everywhere to stop those crimes and save the day.

As a result, no one stepped in. Those that thought something might be amiss all waited for a Hero that never came, and Hawks quickly found himself being shoved into the back of a nondescript car.

Hawks was taken from the middle of a busy street, and not a single person tried to help him.

XXXXXXX

"What the *hell*." Twice breathed, unable to believe what he had witnessed.

A half-smoked cigarette lay at his feet, its tip still burning after it had fallen from his mouth. His gaze darted around at the walking people as they laughed and chattered and smiled, and he had to wonder if he had hallucinated what he had just seen.

Twice had frequented the area near Hawks's Agency like he was wont to do, half-convinced the Heroes knew about him and thought he was spying on Hawks for the League or something. In reality, foolish and impossible what-ifs kept ringing through his mind, and haunting him to the point where he thought he might go madder.

Then Hawks himself had stumbled out of some derelict alley. His coat was gone and his wings were notoriously absent from his back and Twice had only recognized him because he was so used to seeing the Hero's face. A face that had been pale as ashes like he was physically ill. It reminded Twice of a quiet breakdown in an equally trash-filled alleyway and he'd stepped forward, only to freeze when another man appeared after Hawks.

He should not have frozen.

How *deeply* he wished he had not frozen.

Hawks had just been *kidnapped* right in front of him.

In broad daylight.

And *no one seemed to care*.

Where were the Heroes? Why hadn't anyone called them? Why hadn't they saved one of their own?

Then again, Hawks wasn't the type of person Heroes saved, now was he?

Realization struck Twice like a truckload of bricks.

They're finally turning on him.

It was then Twice realized why he really kept hovering in Fukuoka even when logic said it was far too late for him and Hawks to become friends. He was not heroic or selfless but he might just be a decent human being, because he'd seen someone who needed help and wanted to assist them. But he hadn't acted quickly enough, letting his own hesitations hold him back instead.

No more.

Twice was not a Hero. He was a Villain. But that just meant he did not have to wait for self-righteous Heroes that would not come.

Twice yanked his phone out of his pocket and hesitated.

Then he made a call.

"Giran, I need a favor. Tell Dabi to meet me outside Fukuoka."

Atychiphobia

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Chapters contains physical, verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse, dissociation, denial, self-blame, victim blaming, misgendering, threats of sexual assault, allusions and non-graphic descriptions of non-consensual touching/kissing/assault, physical and psychological torture, allusions to non-consensual surgery and medical procedures, non-consensual injections, and suicidal ideation.

THIS WARNING APPLIES TO ALL SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

Read at your discretion.

Hawks opened his eyes to an unfamiliar room. Half his vision took in the white wall, while the other half was partially obscured by the red fabric his face was pressed against.

Step One. Check for mobility and injury.

The only pain Hawks felt was a slight ache in his wings and head, along with a pinching sensation around his ankle. His hands were not bound. There was no blindfold over his eyes. He had no wings to bind, only small bones with tiny, useless feathers. His costume— minus the jacket— was there, but his shoes and socks were gone, leaving him barefoot.

His headphones and visor had been removed as well. His phone was in the alley. No way to get a message out, then. How long had he been unconscious for? He had no idea and no way to find one so he moved on. Something cold was clamped around his right ankle and he did not need to look at it to know it was a manacle.

Step Two. Figure out where I am.

He was laying on his stomach in a bed with the expected manacle around his ankle. Its long chain attached to the floor by the bed, bolted into it with a thick metal plate. It was short enough that he would have difficulty rolling onto his back without his leg getting twisted awkwardly. He carefully pushed himself up, mindful of any bed springs squeaking, and took in the rest of his surroundings.

A single light bulb hung from the ceiling, flickering miserably as it cast slight shadows on the walls. The walls were a blank white. All four of them. Hawks did a double-take. He checked again, just to be sure, and saw he was not mistaken. There was no door or windows and no indicator of what lay outside the walls.

Hawks slid off the bed and onto his feet. The chain attached to his ankle rattled. He froze, holding his breath, but there was no further sound except the pounding of his heart. He crouched by the plate binding his chain to the floor and felt it with his fingers—

Oh, his gloves were gone too. He should have noticed.

Hawks gently prodded the metal instead of frantically yanking on the chain and making noise, trying to get a feel for the type of material it was before deciding whether trying to pull at it was worth it. He had some strength but he doubted he could yank it out from where it was bolted into the floor— which was also metal if the cold bite in his feet was any indication. Maybe he should ask Gree—

There was *no one else* to ask about anything. He was alone and there was no one else there. He was *not* afraid of his captor doing anything to anyone else since there was *no one else*.

Hawks carefully shuffled around and tested the length of the chain. Unless he laid on the floor next to the bed it was too short to use as an effective weapon. And it was not like he could get Kae— his unknown captor to come close over there. It would be too obvious—

His captor was not unknown.

Hawks knew perfectly well who it was.

He huddled by the bed like a child trying to hide from the monsters in the closet and covered his mouth, breath hitching. His throat ached from where Kaetsu had grabbed it, the pain no longer ignored because of his denial.

In front of him, the wall opened.

Hawks recoiled backwards and tried to scramble onto the other side of the bed but the chain did not let him go far, leaving him in sight of the doorway. Kaetsu stepped through and the wall shut behind him, leaving no sign there had ever been an opening.

Hawks's handler hummed to himself as he approached, seemingly ignorant to Hawks's struggle to get away. He sat on the mattress, making it creak, and Hawks pressed himself against the headboard, feeling more and more like a trapped animal. Kaetsu's acid green eyes landed on him and he froze. His useless, small wings twitched but could do nothing to cover him.

Kaetsu tutted. "Turn around."

Hawks's breathing stuttered. His gaze darted around the featureless room and to the chain, searching for a means of escape he did not find. Kaetsu sighed heavily and grabbed Hawks's shoulder, hand clamping over his old scar. Hawks instinctively shoved at him but he may as well be a hummingbird trying to move a mountain.

Kaetsu yanked him around and shoved him face down, exposing his pathetically fluttering wings. A few feathers detached but they floated to the ground before they got anywhere close to Kaetsu, as useless as any old bird's. His weight settled on top of Hawks, pinning his legs,

and he shut his eyes. Cold fingers brushed the pathetic remains of Hawks's wings, probing through the feathers hard enough that Hawks felt the bite of Kaetsu's nails.

"Hmm." Kaetsu murmured. "That won't do at all."

Hawks flinched as Kaetsu grasped a small feather and yanked it out. Then another. And another. With each jolt of pain, Hawks felt a growing number of bloody specks trickle down the exposed bone and swollen, scratched flesh. Kaetsu wiped his bloody fingers on the dark red bedspread.

"Much better. Your wings are so beautiful, my Angel, but you haven't earned the right to keep them yet. Now then…"

Warm breath tickled the back of Hawks's neck and Kaetsu nuzzled his ear, kissing his jaw. A familiar disconnected feeling washed through Hawks's body. Had Kaetsu taken control or was Hawks's own mind at fault for his paralysis? He could only move his eyes, which he firmly shut as he reminded himself not to drift.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

"The Commission wants me to kill you, you know." Kaetsu told him serenely. "The suicide of the young Winged Hero Hawks would be such a beautiful tragedy. The stories would spread of how you never recovered from your traumatic absence, but so bravely fought on for the people's sakes. Eventually it became too much and you jumped off a building. Or— more likely— you slit your wrists in a bathtub." Kaetsu traced lines up Hawks's forearms with his fingertips. "We wouldn't want to risk ruining your pretty face in a nasty fall."

Hawks shuddered.

"Shh." Kaetsu soothed him. "I'm not going to kill you, my Angel. I could never hurt you like that. I need you too much."

He leaned in and Hawks squeezed his eyes shut as his handler left bruises and marks up his throat and along his jaw. A particularly painful bite made Hawks's eyes snap open. The room was too bright, like his pupils had shrunk to let all the light in it could. A wailing sound reached his ears and he belatedly realized it was him making it.

Kaetsu clamped a hand over Hawks's mouth and shook his head wildly, not in an attempt to escape but trying to force himself to shut up. Kaetsu gave him a calculating look that made his stomach shrivel. It was the kind that made him question if Kaetsu had mood swings at all or was simply playing with him. His arms slid around Hawks's waist and he pulled him into his lap, nuzzling the top of his head.

"Shhh, shhhh. Calm down. I'm willing to wait a little longer, my Angel. I don't want to see your body so… *disfigured*."

His hands jerked upward and clenched around Hawks's throat. Hawks gasped, reaching up to try to pry Kaetsu's fingers away, but his handler did not appear to even notice what either of them were doing.

"You were *disfigured* because if you weren't that would mean you were *lying to me*." Kaetsu snarled.

He removed his weight from Hawks and pulled him to face him, pushing his back into the headboard with an arm across his throat. Hawks only got a single gasp of air before the pressure became too much. Black spots crept into his vision but he could still see those furious green eyes. Kaetsu leaned into his face, breath tickling his nose. It smelled like blood and decay.

"You wouldn't lie to me and trick me, right? *Right*, you little *bitch*?" Kaetsu hissed.

Hawks managed a tiny nod.

Kaetsu sighed serenely and relaxed his hold on Hawks, kind and gentle once more. "I know, Angel. I know you're not a liar. The Commission told me what happened. I know the League of Villains altered you. But the Commission has a wonderful doctor who will make you right again."

The contradiction of that with his previous statements about the Commission wanting Hawks dead went right over Kaetsu's head. Or— most likely— he was incapable of seeing that incompatibility at all.

Hawks was too busy coughing and massaging his aching throat to say anything. Even if he wasn't he wouldn't dare to reply.

Kaetsu's expression twisted sorrowfully. "Look at what you made me do."

Hawks submissively dropped his gaze.

Kaetsu grabbed his hair and yanked his head up. "*Look* at me."

Hawks looked, not daring to even blink as his heart hammered in his chest. What was he supposed to do? What did Kaetsu want? Did he want him to apologize? But the last time he apologized, Kaetsu hit him.

The slap he got was not unexpected.

"Ungrateful brat." Kaetsu hissed.

It was the tone he used as Hawks's disappointed handler. Hawks found it preferable to that of a man obsessed with him. As if Kaetsu had read his mind— or his fear— he immediately held Hawks again.

"I'm sorry." he murmured. "I didn't mean to do that. You're just so *frustrating*. Why can't you simply do as I ask?"

Hawks could not make himself respond. He stared at Kaetsu in mute indecision, gaze darting to his hands and away. Kaetsu sighed again, like dealing with Hawks was the most taxing thing he had ever done but he had selflessly taken that burden upon himself. He kissed Hawks's cheek and pulled away, getting up.

Hawks's hopes that he was leaving were instantly dashed as he removed his shirt, boots, and other accessories, leaving them far out of Hawks's reach. He returned to the bed and shoved Hawks down before laying behind him and trapping him in his arms.

"I'll keep you safe." Kaetsu murmured as he stroked Hawks's face, stomach, and side. "I'll keep you *mine*. I promise."

He went quiet. Hawks eventually heard his breathing even out. He did not move, or try to wriggle out of the constrictive arms around him. Instead he stared at the featureless wall as the hours passed, unable to truly know whether it was night or day.

Toshinori would know he was in trouble which meant the Heroes— at least, Miruko, Mockingjay, All Might, Best Jeanist, Ingenium, and Eraserhead— would be looking for him. Right—? No, no of course they would look. That did not give him much hope. Kaetsu was a Commission agent and he knew how to hide his trail. He and Hawks might not even be in Japan anymore.

What kind of Hero thinks other Heroes will release him?

None. Just a pathetic, incompetent *fake*.

Stop feeling sorry for yourself. They need you to act.

Hawks did not elaborate on 'they', not even in the supposed safety of his thoughts. The voices were so silent he may swear they did not exist if he did not know any better.

Help might be coming, but Hawks could not rely on it. There was no message telling the Heroes where he was. There was no Villain complex or Commission building to raid. He could not sit around here and wait for things to get worse when Kaetsu's 'patience' wore out.

They *needed* him to escape.

Hawks had to relea— No.

He had to *rescue* himself.

For them.

XXXXXXX

"You've got to be kidding me." Dabi said flatly. "*That's* why you insisted on me coming here? To look for some *Hero*?"

If Dabi did not know better, he'd think Twice had truly lost his mind. The other man looked so genuinely earnest as he nodded his head, emitting an almost naive type of hopefulness even through his mask.

"Yeah. Hawks was kidnapped and I want your help to find him. Giran already got a few locations for us to check out." Twice paused. "We don't know if he's really there at any of them but he's probably close by."

It was telling that Twice did not immediately contradict himself, as if all his thoughts were united by one goal. He truly was serious about this and his heart seemed set on his mission.

Dabi stopped himself from rolling his eyes at the stupidity of it. "So you want us to go and do what? Rescue him? I hate to break it to you but he probably has a group of Heroes looking for him already. We don't need to waste our time."

"Yes we *do*." Twice hissed with surprising— or maybe it was unsurprising— vehemence. "The Heroes don't have Giran's contacts. The places he gave me are deep in the Villain underworld. There's all this criminal activity like black markets and drugs and Quirk trafficking and brothels. It'll take forever for the Heroes to find anything *close* and raid it. And that's even if they can. They might not even be able to get a *warrant* since the Commission won't let them go there. Besides…" His jaw clenched and Dabi had the feeling he was trying not to tear up. Sentimental idiot. "The Heroes might not rescue Hawks *at all*. He's being *vanished*, Dabi. You know…" He made a shooting motion at his temple. "Taken out of sight and shot in the backyard."

Dabi's cold expression contorted into a grimace. "I know what it means. And *why* would I care about some Hero biting it?"

"Because he's not just a Hero." Twice snapped. "He's a living, breathing person and *they're going to kill him for being different!*"

It was rare to hear Twice shout in rage, but Dabi could not care less.

"Not my problem." Dabi said flatly. "If Hawks thought he was in danger he should have run. Instead he stuck around like a good little angel until they came to tear off his wings. That's on him."

He made to leave but Twice grabbed his shoulder. Dabi glared at him but Twice did not let go.

"You don't believe that." Twice growled. "You may be a Villain, but you're not the kind of guy to blame *victims* for not running." His expression grew pleading. "Dabi, please. Part of being a Villain is doing what we want. And I *want* to find Hawks and help him. Won't you help me?"

Dabi shoved his hand away. "No."

Twice looked at him, and even with the mask, Dabi could tell he was hurt. He covered it with a scowl and exaggerated rude gesture.

"Fine! *I knew you didn't care.* I thought we were buddies who stuck together but I guess not! *I don't blame you.* Well, screw you too then! *I need your help*. I don't need you anyway!"

He turned on his heel and stormed off, but Dabi could tell he had no idea where he was going. Dabi himself could do slightly better since he would not argue with himself, especially if Twice really had to go into the darker part of society to find his little Hero. Most Villains

didn't snitch but there could be a bounty on the League's heads that would interest some of the characters who needed some money.

Whatever. It wasn't Dabi's business. Sure, it would suck if Twice got himself cared but Dabi was not sticking his neck out for some Hero. He was a Villain so why should he care about Heroes hurting Heroes? Answer: he didn't, because Hawks was a Hero just like the rest of the trash. Sure, Hawks was a bit 'younger' than the many Pros, but he was not a helpless child—

He's Fuyumi's age.

Dabi's steps faltered and he halted in place. He stared hollowly at the plain brick wall in front of him, fingers flexing and curling as fire flickered at his fingertips. His hands closed and the flames extinguished.

"Damn it."

He turned around and hurried after Twice.

XXXXXXX

Rumi Usagiyama did not panic. The word 'panic' was not in her vocabulary, thank you very much. Instead she barged forward in a mindless fury, tearing through video after resource after interview, shoving jagged puzzle pieces together and hammering them if they did not fit. She caught several other Heroes in her wake and although it felt like they ran in circles, Miruko knew they had found more than she and Mockingjay would have alone.

"*Just finished recording witness testimonies."* Ingenium was telling her over speakerphone. *"Many of them remember seeing a plain white sedan with tinted windows near the site."*

"We got a license plate. Bee's already tracking it." Mockingjay reported, her fingers tapping rapidly on her own device. "He—" She paused, scowling. "Stolen. Of course it was. The police found it near the Port of Hakata. The cameras *conveniently* stopped working before it showed up."

"*I will go look around personally."* Best Jeanist promised, also on call. *"I'm close by anyway."*

"Do you think he could have taken Hawks out of the country?" Toshinori asked.

His voice was rough, almost as choked and scratchy as it had been when he called Miruko in a panic and told her Hawks was in trouble. If Miruko were a betting kind of woman she'd gamble he had not slept in the four days Hawks had been missing. She knew she and Mockingjay hadn't.

"It's possible." Eraserhead said before Mockingjay could. "We all know the Commission has secret ways out of Japan."

"So Hawks could be anywhere." Miruko said flatly. "He could be on the damn *moon* for all we know."

"Well, I doubt that." Present Mic said.

It was probably meant to be a weak joke but he looked to exhausted for that. His hair was down instead of in its usual style and the shadows under his eyes were close to matching Eraserhead's. The two UA teachers, Miruko, Mockingjay, and Toshinori were at their impromptu 'base'— one of UA's currently unused facilities since any Agencies might not be secure— while Ingenium, Best Jeanist, Fatgum, Suneater, Lemillion, Nejire-Chan, and some of the sidekicks were out searching. Miruko did not know how the students— three of UA's best but still kids— got involved but guessed Fatgum had vouched for at least Suneater since he already knew about Hawks's Quirk outburst.

*If anything will make him do… whatever he did again, it's that **bastard**. I should have asked Hawks about his Quirks when I had the chance.*

Even if he did have access to that ability, it might not help. It was not like Hawks had many feathers to do anything. They had found hundreds of them in the alley along with his phone. Mockingjay had intended to collect them but had gotten a warning from Bee that Commission agents were mere seconds away. They'd been forced to destroy the feathers before the Commission could 'request' to have them for who knew what nefarious purposes.

Mockingjay plucked her phone out of her pocket and held it up, hesitating. She put it away and met the other Heroes' curious stared with a neutral glower. "If we have a reason to think he's in America I have someone to call." Her already stern expression grew colder. "It likely won't be necessary. Even if Kaetsu is working alone, it is probable they are still in Japan. The Commission most likely knows where they are but they're going to wait to 'release' Hawks until he's more *obedient*."

'Broken'. They all knew she meant '*broken*'.

Broken or *dead*.

"They'll want to make a spectacle of this." Mockingjay continued. "Whether Hawks is 'rescued', 'retrieved', or found dead, they're *letting* Kaetsu keep him in part so they have a story when he's found."

Present Mic looked up from their mark-covered map. "Maybe we should—"

"Break the story first?" Miruko interjected. "Oh *yes*. That would be a wonderful idea. Let's tell everyone the Number Three Hero has gone missing *again*. And this time, it's because of a *stalker*."

"If we say something to anger Kaetsu or make him think he's cornered, he'll kill Hawks faster so we can't 'take' him from him." Mockingjay stated.

She said it with such certainty that Miruko had to wonder if she'd dealt with this exact situation before. Then she remembered Mockingjay had been the one to expose Kaetsu last time and supposed she had done her research on the man's psych.

"We need more manpower." Miruko said abruptly. She turned to Toshinori and could not stop herself from glaring. "Now I'm not usually a Hero who asks for help, but we could *really* use your boss right now."

Toshinori shifted his weight. "Well, you see—"

"*Don't* give me excuses." Miruko snapped. "It's been *four days* and All Might hasn't shown up *once!* Is he so busy that he can't appear when we need him? Is that how it is?"

Toshinori looked pained. Miruko would feel bad for snapping at him but Hawks was in the hands of a serial killer who worked for the Commission and *stalked him*. It was selfish and unprofessional, but Miruko just wanted to *scream*.

"So?" she demanded. "Is he on a secret mission? Is he on vacation? *Huh?*"

Eraserhead stepped forward. "Miru—"

Miruko turned on him. "I'm not asking *you*." She whirled back to Toshinori. "You kept saying he'd have Hawks's back. You kept saying he'd help. Well Hawks *needs help now* and yet he's nowhere to be found. So *where the hell* is All Might?!"

Toshinori faltered. He looked away, shutting his eyes, and disappeared in a puff of smoke. Miruko flinched back, raising her foot in preparation to kick.

The smoke receded.

Miruko stared dully, ears flicking backward. "I'm going to kick your teeth in, *Toshinori*."

All Might winced. "I know."

Miruko dragged a hand through her hair, tearing out a few pieces with her fingers. She left them fall to the floor. "We don't have— You know what? We *do* have time. *What the hell is wrong with you?*"

Few could say that they got the Symbol of Peace to recoil like he'd been stung, but Miruko gained that badge on her own.

"I wanted to offer young Hawks someone to talk to without judgment." All Might said, and now Miruko could hear Toshinori in his voice. "I apologize if—"

"He wouldn't have talked to you if he'd known." Miruko interrupted coldly. "I wouldn't have *let* him either."

Toshinori grimaced. "Does he dislike All Might that much?"

Miruko laughed bitterly. "Oh no. Hawks was conditioned to think you're the perfect Hero he should kill himself to be. The Commission always built up how *perfect and wonderful and heroic* you are while *shoving him down*."

If there was any more poisonous bitterness in her tone, Toshinori might have dropped dead. As it was, All Might looked like someone had killed a kitten in front of him. Miruko wanted to be bitter and petty and scream at him but in honesty she was just angry at everything. Mostly herself. She was the one who called Mockingjay away when Hawks was asleep. If she hadn't he might not have left his Agency.

Miruko's fist slammed into the table covered with evidence, sending a few papers fluttering to the floor. "I can't believe I let this happen. After all that talk we gave about being able to protect him, we fucking *failed*."

Eraserhead shot her a look but did not comment, merely scooping the papers back up.

Mockingjay did not comment either. She seemed completely unsurprised by All Might's identity. Miruko wondered if she had known but knew she would never have let Hawks near the man if she had. The Underground Hero abruptly turned on her heel and headed towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Miruko demanded.

Mockingjay leveled a look at her. Her grey eyes were colder than ice. She did not need to say anything.

Miruko let her go.

XXXXXXX

Hawks did not know how long he had been inside this room. All he knew is Kaetsu had slept beside him twelve times and taken him to the bathroom five. No food had been given to him, only some water, and his stomach was starting to twinge from hunger.

There was no toilet in the blank white room so Kaetsu blindfolded Hawks whenever he carried him to the bathroom. Those trips did not help Hawks get a layout of anything. Hawks knew Kaetsu went in extra circles to make sure his captive had no idea what type of place they were in. Even his ears failed him. He did not hear cars or machinery or animals or anything that might give him a clue where he might be. Not even a plane passed overhead.

Whenever he needed to release Hawks, Kaetsu kept the key to his manacle on a string around his neck. Hawks only glimpsed it during those periods and never any other time, so he could only guess that Kaetsu kept it somewhere outside of the room. There was a pattern developing— blindfold Hawks, unlock the chains with key, carry him, carry him back, lock him up with key, remove blindfold— but he did not know how to take advantage of it before Kaetsu inevitably switched it up.

The bathroom became the only place he felt anywhere close to safe with his thoughts because at least Kaetsu did not barge into the small stall he shoved Hawks in. It was not out of courtesy but because they both knew Kaetsu's fingers were itching to strangle Hawks if he saw something he did not like.

Hawks tried not to think about Kaetsu's other victims but could not get the images of their corpses out of his head. How long would it be before his body was found on the side of a road? What would be worse? If it was soon, or never? Kaetsu probably planned to keep him around until his temper or impatience got the better of him.

Not that it already hadn't. Hawks's fingers brushed a bruise below his eye and shifted on the bed in a futile attempt to lay down in a way that did not aggravate any injuries. He had given up on trying to figure out what set Kaetsu off. Whether or not his rapid switches between 'loving' Hawks and despising the 'traitor' were intentional or not, Kaetsu was almost always angry.

When a captor's first instinct was always 'hurt the captive until they stop moving', it was hard to do anything. Hawks was supposed to be too fast for his own good but now he was afraid of moving at all since it wasn't just his life on the line. He was apprehensive about contacting the voices for ideas because what would Kaetsu do to them? He might already know they existed. Hawks tried not to fear for their safety but it was like trying to stop the flow of a wide river with only his hands.

The wall opened and Hawks tensed, sitting up and dropping his gaze to his lap. His chained leg hung off the side of the bed, while his left was bent inward in a half-pretzel. He focused on the developing gash near his inside ankle bone where Kaetsu had cut him with a knife. He'd thought the man was planning to sever his Achilles tendon so he could not walk but Kaetsu had simply slashed the skin and avoided the tendon that would leave Hawks permanently injured. Was it a warning, or just out of sadism? It was likely the latter since Hawks had not even tried to run yet.

Yet.

Hawks did not think bad thoughts like planning to escape and focused on his clasped fingers, rubbing the knuckles with his thumbs, as the bed creaked. Kaetsu's fingers brushed through his hair before grasping it and holding his head still.

The kiss to his temple was hardly noticed by Hawks, who was growing numb either due to the frequent occurrence or his mind initializing attempts to protect him through apathy. He almost wanted to think that his brain had tricked itself into thinking that Kaetsu's touches were no more dangerous than a friendly hand on his shoulder. It would be preferable to acknowledging them for what they really were.

Before Kaetsu could speak, Hawks's stomach growled loudly. He shut his eyes and wished the ache in his gut would just *shut up*.

Kaetsu gave what many would mistake for an affectionate chuckle. "Did you expect me to bring food? I know that you're stupid, but even you have to know that's not how it works. I can't simply give you food along with housing. You have to earn your keep."

Even Hawks could not delude himself into briefly believing he was supposed to clean the room or something. He stared at the blank white wall, unblinking, as Kaetsu pulled him closer. Kaetsu's hand traced the edge of his face, lingering on his jaw. Hawks could shove

him away, or headbutt him, or kick him. He did none of those things and he wasn't even being controlled into obedience.

Kaetsu did not control him with his Quirk simply because he did not want to control Hawks that way. He wanted Hawks to give up on his own just to show how powerless he was.

Hawks *had* given up on his own.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

Hawks shut his eyes and felt breath on his cheek.

Kaetsu chuckled and leaned away. "Just kidding." His grin widened mockingly. "Unless you want to."

Hawks slowly dragged his gaze to Kaetsu's acidic green. Then he silently turned away.

The punch was as expected as the sun setting. As was Kaetsu grabbing his hair and giving him a violent shake.

"Don't give me that attitude, *brat.*"

Hawks did not apologize. It did not matter if he said sorry or not.

Kaetsu pulled Hawks's head up so they were nearly nose to nose. Sour breath washed across Hawks's face but he did not flinch, instead meeting Kaetsu's gaze dully. He could not tell whether his handler was enthralled by his apathy or disappointed.

"I know you secretly want this." Kaetsu told him in a deceptively patient voice. "You could stop me. You could fight me off. You have the training. You have the skill. Yet here we are. Perhaps you *like* the loss of control, my Angel."

Hawks didn't. He did not say it. He did not have to.

Kaetsu laughed. It was an off-putting, distorted sound.

He struck Hawks again and dark splotches danced across his vision.

Another strike caused the splotches to double, and a third sent Hawks temple-first into the edge of the headboard.

When Hawks regained consciousness he was laying down with Kaetsu's familiar weight behind him. His pants were gone and his underwear had been moved down a couple inches on one side but it was not enough for him to panic. He craned his neck and only had a second to spot the syringe in Kaetsu's hand before the needle jabbed into his exposed hip. Hawks's scream of pain was muffled by Kaetsu's other hand, which covered his mouth with so much pressure he could feel the edges of his teeth pressing against the insides of his lips.

"There we are." Kaetsu said pleasantly.

Kaetsu pulled the needle out and left the site exposed. Hawks clutched at it and pulled his hand away, revealing blood on his fingertips. He looked at Kaetsu and his handler laughed at the fearful expression on his face.

"Don't worry, my Angel. It's not Trigger or an aphrodisiac. Or even anything addictive. I don't want you to rely on anything but *me*."

He waited, smirking expectantly, and Hawks knew he actually wanted a response this time.

"What is it, sir?" he croaked.

Kaetsu kept smirking. "It's a secret, Angel." He rose from beside Hawks. "Now, I'm off to run some errands and I'll be right back. Be a good Hero while I'm gone."

He sounded cheerful, almost sweet, but Hawks heard the warning that dared him to try anything while he was gone. If he even *was* leaving and not hanging around to see if Hawks had bad thoughts and plans.

Kaetsu headed towards the door. Hawks swallowed a plea for him not to leave and a hysterical demand to know what had been in that syringe. He watched the door vanish and curled up on the bed, pressing a hand to his side. The injection site had stopped bleeding, leaving only a tiny hole. The skin around it was slightly inflamed but Hawks felt no pain or cold or anything.

He shivered and wrapped himself in the blanket, not caring that it had dried bloodstains. He should try to sleep before Kaetsu came back again but his mind raced as he tried to think of what his handler had injected into his body. If he was some addictive mind-altering drug he should be feeling it by now, right? Hawks closed his eyes, trying to think, and remembered the liquid was clear. So what was it? Could it just be water? Or some other placebo just to freak him out but leave no affect? Or maybe it was a tracker?

Hawks felt a stab of pain in his side. He recoiled and fell off the bed, expecting another shot before he realized he had felt his own nails digging into his skin. He forced his hand away and put them to his head, rocking back and forth.

Keep it together, he begged himself. *If you can't handle this how will you handle what else he's going to do?*

But that was the point, wasn't it? If there was ever proof that Kaetsu still retained his mind and knew exactly what he was doing, this was it. Hawks knew he had a meticulous plan to slowly break his 'Angel', pushing him and pushing him before finally using his Quirk as the final straw to turn him into a broken, poseable doll again.

Hawks climbed back onto the bed, clasped at the tiny, stinging injection site, and shuddered.

He *had to* escape.

XXXXXXX

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

"*GOD DAMMIT!*"

Midoriya winced as Bakugo threw himself at the wall in a frenzy, fists crackling with the small explosions of his Quirk. Beside him, Uraraka and Kaminari were not much better. The former gritted her teeth as she strained to make a window weightless so she could lift it while the latter's hands flickered with electricity as he slammed them into a security screen, both of which failed to do anything.

The golden security doors covering every outside inch of the building was a pretty good clue as to that. It was as if they were made from the hardest metal, opaque and unbreakable even as Iida kicked them with all his strength. This kind of separation had happened before when Amplifier attacked, but the security doors keeping unwanted spies out— and the voices *in*— were much thicker this time. Any other time, Midoriya may marvel and theorize about the skill and technique it took to create such a structure within one's mind. But not now.

He caught Bakugo's arm before he could try to break the wall again. "Kaachan, *stop*. We need to calm down and think."

Bakugo turned on him, palms sparking with miniature explosions. "We don't have any *time* for a damn plan. You *know* what that bastard could be doing to him!"

They didn't know, only suspected. They could not feel anything from Hawks. They might as well be inside the real UA under lockdown, except even the real UA's security doors could not withstand Bakugo's explosions.

"I know." Midoriya said steadily. "But even if we get out, then what? I doubt Kaetsu will let Hawks grow feathers we can use."

"We can use our damn fists—"

"And would you just control Hawks's body to try to escape?" Midoriya continued. "He'd shut down."

Bakugo faltered.

"Plan." Yaoyorozu blurted. "We need a *plan*."

Her stress had nowhere to go so it filled the dorms like poisonous gas.

Ujiyamada and Kaminari stopped trying to break out and slumped where they stood, gasping for breath.

Even Sato faltered, falling to his knees as his shoulders shook from strain.

Mineta weakly pressed a hand on a gold-plated window and leaned his forehead against it.

"Please, Gold. Let us out. Let us *help you*."

XXXXXXX

What do I do?

Fumikage Tokoyami sat on his bed in his mostly-dark room, with Dark Shadow only kept at bay by a few small lights. It was daytime but he was not in the mood to enjoy the sun so his shades were drawn shut. His mother had hinted he should go out with friends, but Tokoyami knew if he met them, he might just do something stupid. He flicked his thumb to scroll down the page of unanswered texts to Hawks and set it down, putting his head in his hands.

*What do I **do**?*

Hawks was not answering his texts. Aizawa-sensei wasn't either and when Tokoyami went to visit Eri, Midnight and Snipe were watching her. Tokoyami did not have Miruko or Mockingjay's numbers. He should have asked for them because then maybe he could figure out if Hawks was in trouble or not.

Tokoyami sent his phone a glare and had to stop Dark Shadow from throwing it out the window. It was a close call. Dark Shadow had the window open and was prepared to toss the phone through it when Tokoyami caught it in midair. He transferred his glare from the phone to Dark Shadow, who blinked at him innocently.

"Throwing this won't help anything." he said, for Dark Shadow and his own reminder. "It won't help find Hawks."

Tokoyami wished he was being paranoid. Hawks could be on a mission or something. He did not need to inform Tokoyami of his every move so that could be the logical reason why he had not responded.

Tokoyami truly wished he was being paranoid, but knew that was not the case. Hawks was not the type to leave his interns' texts unanswered. In fact, he'd insisted he would answer rather vehemently after… *something* had happened with Todoroki.

Tokoyami did not know the exact details, but Todoroki had apparently moved and started visiting animal shelters if his vague statements were any indicator. The kittens were said to be adorable. Though that did not explain why Hawks had been so obviously worried, though he did try to hide it. Iida and Todoroki had not noticed, but Tokoyami had seen his unease. It likely had something to do with the Commission. Had they made their move?

Tokoyami glanced around outside worriedly and put his hands on the windowsill to pull it down.

Before he could, he heard crying.

His gaze snapped to outside and he glanced around, listening intently just to be certain. Sure enough, he heard what sounded like a child's sobs. Tokoyami glanced back towards his door

where he knew his parents, Ai, and Hikaru were, then away. He stepped towards the window and hesitated.

Tokoyami forced himself to turn around and hurried out of his room. His footsteps padded softly on the stairs and he peeked into the dining room. Ai was sitting at the table, scrolling through her phone. She looked up as soon as Tokoyami peered around the corner and cocked her head.

"I think I heard a child crying outside."

Her expression softened the slightest bit. "You did right to come to me first." She pinned him with a sharp red glare. "If we run into trouble, I give you permission to use your Quirk for self-defense. I shall deal with the repercussions." She rose from the chair. "Shall we?"

Tokoyami nodded and head out the door with Ai at his heels. The sound of crying was louder out here. As Tokoyami drew closer it became softer, like the crying child was muffling themself. Soon enough they found themselves by a dumpster. If Tokoyami looked hard enough, he could see the outline of a small figure pressed between the bin and the wall.

The first thing Tokoyami saw was a shock of white next was that kid was around his age, maybe a few years younger. He was certainly smaller, and when compared to Tokoyami's height that said something. What it exactly said was not good when taking in the rest of his appearance. He was wearing a hoodie but the sleeves were pulled up— likely because of the heat— which exposed his arms.

Bandages were wound up his forearms and Tokoyami caught a glimpse of some around his neck, much like Eri had when he first met her. His heart sank. Ai gave a small gasp. Her expression twitched before it smoothed out again.

The kid heard her gasp and finally noticed he had company. The white-haired head snapped up and Tokoyami found himself staring into familiar blue eyes. The boy flinched back, pressing himself against the wall behind the dumpster as his gaze darted frantically, searching for an escape. Finding none he curled up, holding his knees as he huddled in the shadow of the dumpster.

"Please don't send me home."

The boy's voice was tremulous, but slightly deeper than Tokoyami expected. The likeliness that he was close to Tokoyami's age increased, though Tokoyami had never seen a teenager look so… small. Not in stature, but *presence*, like he wanted nothing more than to vanish so he no longer had to exist.

"Who said anything about sending you home?" Ai said. Her voice was the most gentle and soothing Tokoyami had ever heard from her. She sat down and motioned for Tokoyami to do the same. "My cousin and I heard you crying and thought you might need some help. Are you okay?"

The boy tensed, blue eyes sharp and guarded— and *familiar*. "No. I don't need—" He winced, clutching at his neck, and his face crumpled. "I'm so *weak*."

"I highly doubt that, child." Ai said quietly. She did not move closer, simply staying where she was on the outer edge of the dumpster. "My name is Ai, and this is my cousin, Fumi. What's your name?"

The boy nibbled on his lip as if debating whether to tell her. He glanced at her hesitantly and quickly dropped his gaze. "I'm Touya."

Ai glanced at Tokoyami and inclined her head. It took him a second but he realized she was nodding towards the pocket he knew held her Hero license. He took a breath, hoping he understood what she wanted him to do.

"Hello, Touya. I wish that we had met under… better circumstances. Would you like to come into my house? My father is making—"

Touya flinched and clutched at his arm. The bandages had shifted, revealing a burn. It was in the shape of a hand print. Tokoyami's throat felt unnaturally dry. Touya seemed to notice his stare and hastily covered the injury.

Ai's gentle expression was strained. "Touya, who gave you those burns?"

The boy avoided looking at her. "No one."

Ai almost frowned. She met Tokoyami's gaze again and nodded towards her pocket. At first he had to wonder why she did not just say she was a Pro Hero but put together that she was hoping his closer age to Touya would make him trust him more. Understanding what she wanted, Tokoyami turned back to the boy.

"My cousin is a Pro Hero. If someone's hurting you, she can stop them."

Touya's head snapped up and his eyes went wide. "You're a Hero?"

"That's right." Ai admitted. She slowly reached into her pocket and pulled out her altered license which claimed she was Ai Tokoyami. Touya scrutinized it closely as if suspecting its validity and sniffed loudly. If Tokoyami did not know better, he might think the kid was smelling the card.

"Ai. Pro Hero: Darksphere." he said out loud. He wiped at his eyes and lowered his head, his white bangs falling into his face. "You won't let him hurt me anymore, Darksphere? You'll help me? You'll save me?"

Tokoyami spoke before she could. "We will."

Touya chuckled and looked up with acid green eyes. "***Liar.***"

The boy vanished.

Ai's red eyes widened. She lunged towards Tokoyami, hand outstretched. "*NO!*"

Tokoyami felt a strange pulling sensation and she was gone.

No, not *her*.

He was the one who vanished because when he blinked, he was no longer outside his house.

Laughter reached his ears and he saw the white-haired Touya standing beside a white-haired man. For a moment Tokoyami thought this was the boy's father, but then the boy blinked out like a mirage, as if he'd never truly existed. The man remained, smiling at Tokoyami with a grin too wide for his face.

"A fear of losing a protectorate." the man chuckled, and Tokoyami caught a glimpse of a black tongue. "How conveniently *fun*."

Tokoyami blinked and a huge figure that had not been there a second ago was next to the man. Even with the hood shadowing most of its features, Tokoyami could recognize that kind of blank stare anywhere. He stepped back— *Too slow*— and the Nomu's jaw opened.

Light exploded from its maw and Dark Shadow *screamed*, howling in agony as it fled to hide under Tokoyami's shirt. Tokoyami himself was blinded, flailing helplessly as he clutched at his eyes. He lowered them in time to see the Nomu was no longer next to the man.

He turned—

The last thing Tokoyami saw was a large fist coming towards his face.

Apotemnophobia

Bird watching was very fun.

That was the word they thought. Fun.

Their brain was foggy and fuzzy sometimes and thoughts were there and then gone sometimes, but they knew bird watching was fun. Fun was what bird watching was. It was fun. They had watched the nice winged bird a lot and had fun even though the nice winged bird did not notice and think it was fun too.

That was okay. They did not want the nice winged bird to notice. Before they found the nice winged bird they had been alone without the nice winged bird and a girl had seen their default face and screamed. They did not know who they were before but they knew that people did not used to see their face and scream. The little girl did. That hurt their feelings. They did not like that. They did not want to make the nice bird winged scream so they did not let the nice winged bird see their face as they watched the nice winged bird.

Their master wanted the nice winged bird to scream.

Their master wanted the nice winged bird to scream and cry and plead and break.

They knew this in their everything like it was their purpose to make the nice winged bird scream.

But they liked the nice winged bird. The nice winged bird flew around sometimes with big red wings and sometimes with different clothes and no wings when it was dark. That was strange. They liked the nice winged bird even though the nice winged bird was strange and did not have wings sometimes. They liked the nice winged bird's dark winglessness outfit best— No wings quiet secret. They liked it more than his costume outfit and day-disguise outfit because the winged bird's winglessness outfit covered everything.

They liked the other bird too. That bird did not have wings but they knew the other bird was a bird too. They did not know why they knew. That bird was darker and solemn...er but they liked the other bird too. They did not let the other bird see them either because they knew the other bird would not like them. The other not-winged bird was very protective of the nice winged bird. That was not strange. The nice winged bird needed protection.

They knew their master wanted to hurt the birds but they did not want to hurt the birds.

So they ignored the whispers that demanded they hurt the birds.

Their *mission* was to watch.

They did *not* have other orders.

They knew the nice winged bird's scent so they could follow the nice winged bird if they wanted. They had been in the nice winged bird's home with the rabbit and they knew the nice winged bird's scent.

They had not seen the nice winged bird in a long time.

They missed the nice winged bird.

They wanted to see the nice winged bird.

Their master wanted the nice winged bird to scream and cry and hurt.

But they did *not.*

They. Did. *Not.*

Catch the birdie.

They smelled the nice winged bird.

Catch the birdie.

They wanted to see the nice winged bird.

Catch the birdie.

They followed the smell.

XXXXXXX

Shoto Todoroki was not used to smiling much. Now, he found he could not stop as he left Mustafu Animal Rescue Shelter. There were paw prints on his shirt and the bottom part was soaked from where an overeager puppy had jumped on him after a bath, but despite working hard for the past six hours, Shoto felt… content.

He stood on the corner outside the shelter as he waited for Fuyumi to come pick him up and scrolled through his phone, looking over the pictures himself and his coworker had taken. Photos of dogs, cats, rabbits, hamsters, lizards, and other animals filled his phone's album, which before today only had a couple pictures of his friends occupying it. He could not wait to show Fuyumi and their mother.

Fuyumi's car pulled up to the curb and Shoto approached. He spotted a figure in the passenger's seat and went still, falling onto his back foot, taking stock of the situation. The man did not appear to have any weapons, but tattoos lined what Shoto could see of his arms and fingers. Shoto did not know what the strange circle-like symbols with cross-like extensions on the back of his hands were, but he was certain the English letters spelling "Death" were inked on the fingers of both hands.

Fuyumi noticed him and rolled down her window. "Shoto, it's okay. This is a… friend."

Her voice was trembling. Shoto's jaw clenched and he circled the car, getting into the backseat behind the stranger.

The man glanced back at him with an apathetic expression and blandly raised his hands into the air. "I'm an Underground Pro Hero. Please don't attack me."

He spoke in a bored drawl, as if being mistaken for a Villain and attacked was a minor annoyance more than anything. In a way, he kind of reminded Shoto of Aizawa. If Aizawa wore a white leopard-print like hat, had ear piercings, and too many tattoos to count.

Shoto glanced at Fuyumi and she nodded firmly as she pulled away from the corner. Her hands were white on the wheel. "Law will be staying with me for a while. And Mom, if we stay at her place."

"Is Law your Hero name or your real one?" Shoto asked suspiciously. "Or a fake?"

Law chuckled. It was more of a dry 'heh' than a laugh. "Law is my real name. You might not appreciate my Hero moniker. I was an edgy teenager."

Shoto waited stoically.

Law matched his stoicism but eventually rolled his grey eyes, turning to the front of the car. "It's 'Death Surgeon'."

Shoto blinked. "You and my classmate would get along well. He wanted to be called 'King Explosion Murder'."

Law huffed. "If you're talking about the one who won the Sports Festival, I doubt it."

Shoto could not take offense on Bakugo's behalf at that. He looked to Fuyumi, who stared at the road ahead with a strained expression.

"Fuyumi? Why do you have a Pro Hero accompanying you?" With his suspicion over Law's appearance dealt with, something was allowed to click. He jolted upright. "Has father—?"

"It's not him." Fuyumi reassured him, but her voice was still shaking. "We just need a guard for a while. Just in case. We were supposed to have one earlier but *he* refused."

The earlier joy Shoto felt slipped away, leaving a horrible sinking feeling. "What aren't you saying?"

Fuyumi glanced at him in the mirror and her expression crumpled. She pulled over to the side of the road and rubbed at her eyes, breath hitching. She was *terrified*, Shoto realized, her breath coming in quick, shaky pants. As Shoto sat there, he watched her skin drain of color. He recognized the signs of an anxiety attack from his books but the procedures for dealing with one fled his mind, leaving him frozen. Law flicked on the hazards of the car and turned back to Fuyumi.

"Fuyumi-ya, may I touch your hand?"

Fuyumi nodded sharply and Law grasped her hand with surprising gentleness. He placed her fingertips on the tattoo on the back of his left hand and spoke, voice level and calm.

"When I was in middle school, I actually designed these tattoos during a particularly boring math class. My teacher was not pleased that I drew on myself, to say the least. Have any of your students done things like that?"

"All t-the time." Fuyumi stammered. "Once, uh, once Miki thought it would be a good idea to dye her classmate's hair using permanent markers. They snuck into the bathroom during recess and— and spent it coloring their hair." Her laugh was a little breathy, but Shoto could see her relaxing. "The teacher watching over recess did not even notice until I pointed out we now had four students with pink hair instead of two. They gave themselves hearts on their cheeks too."

"I bet their parents were happy." Law drawled.

"Not in the slightest." Fuyumi laughed.

Her breathing had evened out though she momentarily leaned on the wheel, skin still pale.

"Would you like me to drive?" Law offered.

Fuyumi nodded. She got out of the car and began circling around but abruptly went to the back seat instead, sitting next to Shoto. She grasped his hand, squeezing his fingers, and Shoto noticed her hands were as cold as her Quirk's ice. Law took the driver's seat and they continued on their way. Shoto looked from his sister's vice-like grip on his hands to her pale face and bit his lip, wondering if he should ask her what happened again. She noticed his stare and a shudder passed through her. She abruptly yanked him into tight hug.

"It could have been you."

Shoto's confusion became dread and he looked to Law for answers.

The Underground Hero met his gaze momentarily and grimaced, looking back to the road.

"Your classmate, Fumikage Tokoyami is missing." He said as Fuyumi clung to her brother. "We believe he has been kidnapped by a serial killer."

XXXXXXX

"This is a waste of time." Dabi spat.

He and Twice had gone from hideout to hideout, abandoned warehouse to warehouse, abandoned hospital to hospital, relying on Giran's info in their search to locate the stupid bird. After more than a week with absolutely nothing, Dabi had enough. He did not become a Villain to do a stupid Hero's job and save another damn Hero.

So as Twice begged him to check yet another shady and abandoned facility, Dabi's already thin patience became even thinner.

"This could be the place." Twice pleaded.

"It probably isn't." Twice contradicted a second later.

"But it could be." Twice argued.

Dabi growled and glanced behind them into the decrepit, dirty alley they had just exited before turning back to the equally decrepit, dirty warehouse they intended to search. Just like the others they had spent all week scouring. If Dabi did not know Giran so well— enough to trust his intel, anyway— he may think the information broker was scamming them. He had better not be if he did not want his goatee burnt off. Dabi did not appreciate being dragged around on a wild Hawks chase.

If they found nothing here, Dabi was done and Twice could keep searching on his own. Sure, Dabi owed Hawks— and that was the *only* reason he was helping other than to make sure Twice did not get himself caught by an ambitious bounty hunter— but he had better things to do.

As Twice walked right out of the alley and kicked down the door to the abandoned warehouse, Dabi resolved to let the stupid fool get himself arrested or murdered *after* this place and moodily followed him inside.

Oh, would you look at that.

There was nothing but dirt, more dirt, a few broken tables and windows, support beams, and dirt.

What a surprise.

Twice ignored how the dirt and dust on the floor had been undisturbed for years and walked ahead, looking around the wide open space with a careful scrutiny that Dabi might admire if he had not seen it before. He followed Twice as he carefully checked the dusty floor for any trapdoors or the like. This was such a waste of time. Unless one of Hawks's captors had a Quirk that let them move dust around, it was obvious no one had been in here in years.

Though it *was* a little strange that no homeless people had attempted to stay here. Still, it was similar to the other places they had been to in that regard. There were plenty of people who needed shelter in the area but they roamed around the streets instead, avoiding the places Giran sent Twice and Dabi to like they were haunted. By this point, Dabi would not mind finding a ghost. At least then they would be finding *something*.

Twice stopped scanning the floor— leaving trails of footprints in his wake— and headed towards the small office at the back of the warehouse. Hands in his pockets, Dabi followed, idly watching dust motes float through the air.

A shadow moved outside the window.

Dabi turned away from it, fingers flexing in his pockets, but he did not ignite them. Instead he followed Twice into the office and watched him rummage around.

"There has to be something." Twice muttered to himself.

"There's nothing at all!" Twice hissed.

"It can't be a waste of time." Twice moaned.

"Admit it. It is. Again." Twice snapped.

"*DAMN IT!*"

Twice's hands slammed down on the desktop and it broke in half. He stared at it and growled before he slumped in the moldy chair beside it and put his head in his hands.

"Damn it… He's probably dead by now."

Dabi could hear how much it pained him to say that. A few minutes ago he would probably agree and encourage Twice to turn that despair into an angry desire to burn Hero Society down. Now, he could not press his goals onto Twice in good conscience.

'Good conscience.' What a *joke.*

The hair on Dabi's nape prickled.

He was right.

They were being watched.

Dabi threw a plume of flame at the wall behind them and was rewarded by a startled yell. Twice rose from the chair, knocking it over, and dashed out of the office, mindless of the lingering flames. Dabi swore, following the idiot to make sure he did not get himself killed.

He rounded the corner in time to see Twice body slam a costumed Hero to the ground, using his measuring tape to tie his hands behind his back. The Hero struggled but Twice grabbed his head and slammed it into the dirty floor, yanking it back up by his hair.

Dabi did not recognize this Hero. He was not particularly unique. Just a brown-haired guy in a cliché Hero costume, complete with a nicely flammable cape. It was probably some low-level nobody that no one cared about. So what was he doing here?

Dabi had a feeling he knew. He put on a lazy smirk and crouched in front of Twice's captive, arms settled lightly on his bent knees. "So this is one of the Commission's best, huh? Consider me *not* impressed."

The anger that flickered across the Hero's expression gave him away. He seemed to realize it and sneered at the Villains, teeth bared in defiance. "You're smarter than you look, *Villain*."

It was hilarious that he said 'Villain' as if it were the worst insult anyone could say to a person. Dabi was almost tempted to sniffle dramatically and wipe away an imaginary tear to show just how deeply that hurt him. Instead he grabbed the Commission Hero's neck with a

hand just hot enough to hurt. The Commission Hero hardly flinched, but Dabi was nowhere close to causing him pain just yet.

"So I'm guessing Twice was right about your bosses vanishing Hawks, huh?" he said calmly. Understanding dawned and he had to scoff. "Giran knew they would realize we were looking at suspicious places and send one of you to tail us. That scheming bastard."

"Where's Hawks?" Twice demanded and Dabi repressed a sigh at his impatience.

Did Twice know nothing about getting information?

Probably not, actually.

Twice did not seem like the type who needed to get intel like this. Or who had any training in that field. Dabi's lip curled in disgust. He wondered what dear old Endeavor would think if he knew what Dabi ended up using the 'heroic' interrogation skills he had been taught for. He might approve since it was only on criminals up until now, that bastard. Wait, scratch that. Endeavor would not approve of anything Dabi did even if he ended world hunger, brought about galaxy-wide peace, and saved cute little kittens from trees.

"You won't get anything out of me, Villain." the Commission Hero sneered.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that." Dabi drawled. "Twice, tie him to that pole would you?"

Twice did as he asked. Dabi noticed he tied the bonds just a little too tightly. He approved. Twice glanced from the Hero to Dabi and rocked back and forth impatiently.

"Now what?"

"We're going to make him talk." Dabi said steadily.

Twice squinted at him. It was an uncomfortably innocent expression for a grown man and Villain. "Huh?"

Dabi met his genuinely confused gaze with a steady one of his own. Damn, Twice was too nice of a guy for this. He was by no means innocent or blameless, but at his core he was a kind man with a soft heart. Dabi was a monster, but he…

He…

He did not want to see Twice lose that. It was simply unnecessary was all.

So Dabi stepped forward and put a hand on Twice's shoulder. Twice looked from it to the Commission Hero and back again and his eyes went wide as he realized what Dabi was planning.

"Go outside, Twice." Dabi said softly.

Twice went outside.

As he left, Dabi saw him cover his ears.

XXXXXXX

Tokoyami was never alone. With Dark Shadow, that was an impossibility, but he often preferred the single companionship of his Quirk to socialization and hanging out with friends. Now, Tokoyami found himself desperate for any interaction with a person that was not his kidnapper or that Nomu that always hid her face in the shadow of her hat.

He wished desperately for shadows as well. How he *wished* he could have some darkness. Even the faint outline his own body could make would suite him just fine.

Bright lights illuminated his isolated room from every angle. The only shadows left were a small one directly under Tokoyami's feet and one from the thin chain around his wrist which kept him attached to a wall. Even his bed— consisting of a bolted down pad and no blankets — was on the floor, preventing Dark Shadow from climbing under anything for some darkness.

As a result, his Quirk was becoming as bedraggled as him. In fact, he could not recall Dark Shadow being so small and thin since he was a child. He was almost smaller than Tokoyami's hand now.

Tokoyami thought Quirk-personality link theories were mostly garbage but he could not deny the increasing anxiety with each passing light-filled hour. Like most humans needed sunlight or they'd become despondent and stressed, Tokoyami and Dark Shadow needed shadows and darkness.

He did not know why Dark Shadow did not merely retreat into him like he normally would. Had their captor— who serenely introduced himself as Kaetsu— done something to prevent Dark Shadow from finding even that reprieve from this hellish world of light, or was it Tokoyami's own fear making him not want to be alone, thus forcing his Quirk to remain?

At least he was being fed. It was just instant ramen and water but it was something. The noodles were getting harder to choke down due to nausea but Tokoyami was glad to at least have some food in his stomach. He did not know why this Villain had kidnapped him and Hawks but he hoped he would not find out. It was inevitable that he would so he needed to have all the strength he could. Until then, he was stuck with his thoughts and half-baked plans.

There was nothing in this room that could help. The only furnishing in the desolate room was a small television on the wall. There was no remote and he could not reach the screen to turn it on himself so it was as useless as any other decoration. Tokoyami preferred that to the alternative. He'd seen enough horror movies to guess what he'd see once it was on. He wondered if Hawks had one in his room. He could not see any cameras but that did not mean there were none.

Tokoyami could not see Hawks but he knew he was here. Their captor had told him as much. And if he strained his ears, he occasionally heard the sounds of a struggle and flesh hitting flesh. Was Hawks fighting whenever Kaetsu came in?

If Hawks was fighting, he wasn't winning. He would have barged through the door with a grin and told Tokoyami it was time to hightail it out of there if he had. Tokoyami doubted their captor had taken it well when Hawks fought back and could only hope his mentor had not been injured too badly. He was not sure he could get himself and an injured Hawks out of here, wherever here was.

With nothing better to do, Tokoyami crawled into bed to fall asleep.

He had barely closed his eyes when the screaming started.

XXXXXXX

The room was brighter. In hindsight, it had been brighter for a few cycles now. More lighting fixtures had been added, lighting up the room enough that it could almost be mistaken for a hospital room. That uncomfortable brightness was the first thing Hawks noticed when he opened his eyes.

It had been maybe another ten cycles of Kaetsu sleeping beside him since he left to run his 'errands'. Cycles, not days, because Hawks could not trust that Kaetsu only came in every night. It didn't really matter. Hawks was beginning to lose track anyway. Keeping a mental count was not doing anything. All that mattered was Kaetsu was here. Hawks felt Kaetsu's breath on the back of his neck and kept still, hoping not to wake him.

It was difficult not to move because Kaetsu's arm lay over his hip where he'd injected him again, sending twinges of pain from the site due to the unwanted pressure. That was another reason Hawks could not say it was ten days. Kaetsu had injected him with that unknown substance eighteen more times already and Hawks still had no idea what his handler was shooting into his body. The lack of notable side effects did not give him any peace of mind. He tried not to fear what it could be doing to his body.

Hawks had been given five meals in total. He'd had twelve more bathroom trips. He had not been allowed to wash up, with Kaetsu pulling him out of the stall before he could attempt to even put water in his hair. The locks were grimy and on the verge of becoming greasy, laying limp atop Hawks's head. Crusted blood covered his injuries and clothes, and some of them were starting to itch. Would Kaetsu care if they got infected?

The cut on his ankle was particularly worrying. Its swelling had increased, and it was becoming difficult to stand on that leg. Hawks's other ankle was not doing much better, becoming chaffed and rubbed raw from the manacle. His wrists had their own bracelets of purple bruises from Kaetsu's grip.

Hawks felt Kaetsu shift and the arm was removed from his side. He heard his handler pad away and come back. He braced himself and did not flinch as the needle pierced his skin. Other than the pain and sting, he felt nothing. Kaetsu removed the syringe and set it far out of Hawks's reach. Then he began yanking the tiny feathers out of Hawks's wings again, plucking them out one by one. Hawks did not flinch. It was all routine now.

Hawks kept his eyes shut and tried to focus on anything but his wings and the feeling of Kaetsu's nails scraping the bloodied appendages. Kaetsu tossed the last useless feather into

the bin and stroked Hawks's grimy hair like an owner caressed their pet.

"You've been so good for me." Kaetsu murmured. "I almost don't want to bring my gift to you just yet." He kissed Hawks's cheek and Hawks felt him smiling. "How about I let you wash up instead?"

Hawks's insides turned to ice.

Kaetsu did not carry him to the bathroom this time. Instead a collar closed around Hawks's neck and he was dragged along in circles. Kaetsu did not slow as Hawks stumbled and wobbled like a newborn calf behind him, limping heavily as each step caused pain to lance up his legs.

He was shoved into a room and heard the clank of metal being attached before Kaetsu ripped the blindfold off of him. His handler immediately stepped outside and shut the door, locking it with a metallic *click*.

Hawks hesitated, cautiously taking in his surroundings. He was in another bathroom that was slightly larger than the one he was used to. This was had a shower and bathtub. His chain had been attached to the wall next to it. Hawks ignored the manacle for the moment and inspected the shower instead, trying to glean whatever information he could from his surroundings.

The sink, toilet, and tub were all grimy and covered with dirt and gunk, but in an old, stained way that suggested they had not been used in years. The tiles lining the shower walls were a pale, pastel blue. Chunks of caulk were missing from between them and many were cracked. Mold grew in the empty spaces, mostly green but with some darker black shades that he should avoid touching.

The shower head was thin and long, but Hawks could see it was bolted down and sturdy enough that he would be unable to pull it out of the wall without tools.

Overall, the shower looked very generic and standard.

Not standard for a house, but definitely for a public place.

We're in a hospital.

An abandoned one if the cracked walls and grimy tiles were any indication. Hawks eyed the metal plate holding his chain to the wall and noticed it was newer than everything else. He felt a tiny bit better at that, because that meant the hospital's former workers were not chaining their patients to things.

Hopefully.

Hawks turned on the water and let the loud splashing noise cover his attempts to yank the chain out of the wall. It did not budge and he gave up on that endeavor, accepting he was still stuck. There was no mirror to break for some shards either.

Hawks reluctantly put any escape plans on hold and stepped into the shower.

Showering was nerve-wracking. Hawks washed as quickly as he could, glancing nervously towards the door as he braced himself for Kaetsu to open it. His handler refrained and Hawks managed to wash the shampoo out of his hair and blood off his skin with trembling hands, but no incidents. He kept the water running as he stepped out, hoping to give himself some extra time.

As he emerged, he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the metal of the showerhead. Warped as it was, it was easy to see the bruises and cuts on his face. He had not even known he had a cut across his cheek and over his nose. Any pain the injury caused was lost by the constant ache of the others.

He wrapped the towel around his chest and quickly shoved his costume under the water in an attempt to get at least some of the blood and grime off. Only a bit washed out and he reluctantly removed it from the running water, shaking it out as much as he could before putting them back on. He preferred wet clothes to bloody ones. If he got sick Kaetsu might have to take him to a doctor.

Hawks recalled what doctors might be available and shivered. He kept the water running and sat on the soaked floor, staring at the door. The collar pulled at his neck but other than to lean back enough that he could breathe, Hawks did not bother moving.

Kaetsu retrieved him without a fuss and Hawks was chained in his room again.

He did not even struggle.

The voices were still cut off but Hawks could practically hear Orange in his head, screaming at him that he was pathetic and condemning him for giving up so easily.

Hawks lay on the bed, resigning himself to more hours or days or weeks with useless, berating truths about his cowardly nature circling in his head and no plan for an escape. Then he heard breathing and noticed Kaetsu had not left. He turned back to his handler and saw—

Kaetsu had his knife out.

In his other hand was a hacksaw.

Hawks jerked his sight away from it and focused on the wall, heart crawling into his throat. He pressed his back against the headboard with his legs curled defensively to his chest, but thought better of it. Instead he dove beneath the bed like a terrified dog.

Kaetsu grabbed the chain around his ankle and yanked on it but Hawks desperately clung to the leg of the bed. He curled up to keep his ankles out of reach as Kaetsu's hand appeared under the bed and groped for him. He did not know why he bothered hiding since it would only delay the inevitable.

Sure enough, Kaetsu's pulls grew rougher until he forced Hawks's leg straight and into his range. A hand grasped Hawks's ankle and he was dragged out from under the bed. Kaetsu did not bother to try to lift him onto the mattress and pinned him stomach down on the floor.

Kaetsu's knife ruthlessly tore through cloth and skin, leaving shallow gashes from his back to his thighs. Kaetsu's rough fingers grasped torn wings and ripped the few remaining feathers out of the already bloody appendages.

Hawks's eyes went round and his jaw went wide in pain. Hoarse, inhuman screams tore themselves from his throat and he tried to shove Kaetsu off but he was weak and useless and pathetic so the larger man did not budge an inch. Hawks tried to fight anyway, out of desperation and fear more than defiance, and Kaetsu laughed in his face.

In an instant control of his limbs was taken from Hawks, as simply as plucking a flower from the dirt.

Kaetsu had finally used his Quirk on him.

Hawks's body went limp, unable to move as Kaetsu kissed his neck and gently caressed his right wing. The control was not complete— because Kaetsu *wanted* him to beg— and half-spoken pleas mixed with his hysterical, wordless whimpers.

Kaetsu shushed him. "Shh, Angel. I'm not angry at you. I know it's not your fault your feathers keep growing back. Your Quirk is so beautiful. So nearly *perfect*."

He brushed a hand over Hawks's stinging wing again and Hawks went silent, staring unblinkingly at the wall as a grey tinge crept across his vision. He felt Kaetsu move and his chest heaved with each hitching breath. Kaetsu stopped caressing his wing and stroked his hair instead. The motion was smooth and rhythmic, and from anyone else it might be soothing.

"You should be grateful for what you have, you know. The Commission ran some tests and they say you can regenerate your wings as long as part of the bones remain."

Out of the corner of his eye, Hawks saw Kaetsu pick up the saw.

He could not move.

He could not *move.*

"It won't be permanent, but it'll take a while for your wings to grow back." Kaetsu continued calmly. "Maybe by then you'll deserve them."

Hawks could not move.

He could not move.

He *could not move*.

Hawks tried he tried he tried to move, to do something, *anything.* He could only shut his eyes. Images of his future self's bloody back filled his mind so he forced them open, focusing on the blank white wall as Kaetsu grabbed his right wing.

It did not take long for Hawks to begin screaming again.

Eventually the pain became too much and Hawks slipped into merciful unconsciousness.

He woke on the bed.

The first thing he noticed Kaetsu was not with him.

The second was the blankets smelled like blood.

The third was his back hurt.

Hawks tried to sit up but his limbs felt weak, trembling violently as his vision doubled. He took short, panting breaths as he forced himself upright, leaning heavily against the headboard at his right side. Something pulled and he realized there were large patches of gauze taped to his shoulder blades.

His back felt too light.

The familiar weight of his wings wasn't there.

They *weren't there—*

Afraid to look, Hawks desperately felt his shoulder blade through the gauze, ignoring how the tape pulled at his skin.

His fingers slid along smooth gauze and nudged small bumps. A vague feeling of detachment washed over him.

Hawks could not be certain through the gauze but it seemed— ***seemed*** *because it's not true it's not true it's* ***not***— his wings had been severed through the bone only a couple inches from his skin.

He forced himself to look and his fragile grip on denial broke. Instead of bones hanging down, there were only two small bumps on his shoulder blades. Those were all that remained of his wings.

That was fine.

It was fine.

They had never been so badly damaged before, but Kaetsu said they would grow back.

They would grow back.

They *would*.

A keening sob built in Hawks's throat and he muffled it with a hand. Another, louder one broke through and he pressed his hand hard against his mouth, curling up on the bed and biting his pointer finger hard enough to draw blood. He could not cry. Good Heroes did not cry. Kaetsu would be angrier if he cried.

Especially since he deserved this.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry…

XXXXXXX

Hawks had stopped screaming a while ago.

Every time Tokoyami let his thoughts drift, he heard his former mentor's agonized screams cut off. Sometimes it was an abrupt shift from sound to silence. Other times his memories changed and he swore he heard a wet gurgle.

Tokoyami prayed his memory was faulty and playing tricks on him. It had to be, but whenever he tried to close his eyes and rest, images of Hawks laying in a pool of red as he choked on his own blood plagued his mind. He could not sleep and was almost glad, knowing his nightmares would be filled with graphic images of what could possibly be his mentor's death—

No.

No.

Hawks was *not* dead.

Surely their captor would have come to gloat if he was.

Tokoyami tried to reassure himself that the Villain would do such a thing as he paced back and forth in his too-bright room, dragging his hands through his feathers. For once Dark Shadow was much more put-together than he, and murmured reassurances in his ears.

No, Hawks was not still screaming.

No, Hawks was not laying in the corner drenched in red, staring accusingly at Tokoyami with empty golden eyes.

No, Tokoyami was *not* alone and waiting to die too, because their captor would have come to gloat about Hawks's death. He would have. He *would* have.

Hawks was not dead.

Hawks was not dead.

Hawks was *not* dead.

Tokoyami heard the click of a lock.

He backed away from the door as much as he could and glared at it, ignoring how his heart beat as frantically as a hummingbird's wings.

The door opened to reveal the Nomu woman. She stepped inside silently and shut the door behind her. Kaetsu was nowhere in sight. Tokoyami kept an eye on her as he remained close to his wall. His chain was too short to be much use as a weapon but he might be able to dodge if she rushed him.

The Nomu woman looked up, letting him see blank white eyes, and his breath caught in his throat.

If he did not know better, he would swear he was looking at an older, distorted version of Kyoka Jiro.

It was not a kind revelation.

Tokoyami's thoughts whirled with all the possibilities and he desperately thought back to the last time he had heard anything about his classmate. They were all on vacation, but hadn't Yaoyorozu mentioned spending time with her for her birthday? Surely the League of Villains could not turn someone into a Nomu that quickly. *Was* Kaetsu with the League?

The not-Jiro Nomu stepped closer to Tokoyami. It was a small, measured step that reminded him of a video he had seen of a tiger stalking its prey. Dark Shadow quivered but raised its too-thin arms, curling its hands into fists as it floated in front of Tokoyami. Tokoyami tried not to think about how a light breeze would probably be enough to bat Dark Shadow aside.

The Nomu stepped closer.

Closer again.

Closer, until it loomed over him.

He had not noticed how tall it was. It rivaled All Might in height. Even with the deceptively human clothes it wore, he could see its body was also undeniably feminine. Tokoyami had no doubt it could easily snap his neck with a single hand.

The Nomu did not snap his neck.

It did not touch him either.

It simply stared at him with a distantly serene expression. That serenity unnerved him more than the emptiness he had seen in other Nomu because serenity suggested there was some type of sentience in there instead of a completely hollow shell.

Then the Nomu smiled at him, revealing sharp teeth.

They were covered in blood.

"Pretty bird." it said, voice guttural and distorted.

Tokoyami's mind and body went numb and fell to his knees, slumping against the wall. If the Nomu had attacked him then, he doubted he would even feel it. He barely noticed as the Nomu left, locking the door behind it. Dark Shadow wrapped around him, trembling violently, and he belatedly realized *he* was the one shaking.

He huddled against the wall of the too-bright room with Dark Shadow desperately clinging to him and did not bother to muffle his sobs.

Autophobia

"We need to do something."

Todoroki did not lift his head from his arms at Midoriya's proclamation.

Sitting at a table at Yaoyorozu's house with many of his classmates was not how he expected to spend his break. Due to Tokoyami's disappearance, their Quirk training trip had been delayed, leaving Class 1-A with little to do. So here Todoroki was. Here they all were, even Bakugo. All except one.

"And what would that be?" Iida asked.

His boisterous, confident tone had been replaced by a weary tenor that made him sound much older than his years. Ashido was similarly despondent, sitting with her head on the table as Kirishima laid a comforting hand on her arm. Beside him, Jiro shivered and lowered her head, hands tugging insistently at her ear lobes. Even Todoroki could tell she was upset. He had not known she cared so much for Tokoyami. Or maybe she was upset for him since she kept glancing his way.

Midoriya looked around at the tense, hopeless faces that looked to him for instructions and faltered. "We could try to gather information—"

"The Pros are already doing that." Yaoyorozu interrupted, tone apologetic.

Midoriya gritted his teeth. "Well maybe they missed some—"

"Do you *really* think that?" Bakugo interjected, much more coldly than Iida. "Or are you just trying to play Hero again?"

"Hey." Kaminari jabbed him in the shoulder. "Be a bit nicer for *once*, would you?"

Bakugo abruptly rose from his chair, knocking it back.

"This is a waste of time." He spat.

Bakugo stormed out, and Todoroki had the feeling he would not come back. He was not the only one.

"Good riddance." Sato muttered.

Iida turned on him in an instant. "Do not say that about your classmate! I shall ensure he gets home."

He raced out of the door before they could stop him.

Todoroki quickly rose as well.

"Where are you going?" Tsuyu asked.

"After Tenya."

He headed to the door only to find Uraraka was keeping pace with him.

She noticed his look and gave him a sad smile. "There's strength in numbers."

Todoroki nodded sharply and they went after Iida and Bakugo. By the time they found them, Bakugo was close to exploding, palms crackling as he cussed at Iida. Among the swears, he snarled that he did not need a bodyguard.

"I don't care." Iida stated. "I am the Class President and I will *not* lose another friend."

Bakugo caught sight of Uraraka and Todoroki and his red eyes burned with disgust. "We're not friends."

He turned on his heel and stalked down the street.

Iida, Todoroki, and Uraraka kept their distance but followed him all the way home, no matter how many times Bakugo told them to leave.

When they returned to Yaoyorozu's, Todoroki asked Midoriya why he did not follow as well.

"Kacchan is strong." Midoriya said simply. "He can take care of himself."

Todoroki thought of Hawks and Tokoyami and found himself shaking his head in disagreement.

"It doesn't matter how strong you are. No one should be alone."

XXXXXXX

You're pathetic.

You deserve this.

You're sitting here moping and doing nothing. Just goes to show how weak you really are.

You deserve this.

Even your future self kept fighting after he lost his wings ***and*** *was tortured. But what are* ***you*** *doing?* ***Absolutely nothing****.*

You deserve this.

What kind of Hero gives up, huh?

You deserve this.

*Just go ahead and keep laying here. Lay around and wait for Kaetsu to finally kill you. That sounds like a **great** plan.*

You deserve this.

Hawks did not need separate voices in his head to tell him how weak he was. His mind did it all on his own as he lay in bed, staring numbly at the wall.

He did not know how long he had been like this.

He did not care.

Kaetsu had come in many times since he took Hawks's wings. Hawks did not bother to count anymore. His handler used his Quirk to take control of Hawks's body from him but Hawks was almost used to it now. He sliced Hawks's skin with his knives a lot, leaving small cuts like surgical incisions everywhere. Nothing too bad, really.

Afterward Kaetsu took pictures, placing Hawks in poses that showed off his wounds like he modeled clothes. It wasn't a big deal— it was just training— so Hawks mostly drifted through it or stared at the blank white walls as the camera went *click click click*.

Kaetsu kept giving him those injections a few times, and forced food down Hawks's throat twice. Hawks only knew it had been twice because he could not ignore Kaetsu forcing his mouth open and shoving a tube down his esophagus.

It didn't matter.

None of it mattered.

Hawks did not struggle at all, no matter what Kaetsu did. Why bother? If he somehow got the upper hand, Kaetsu would simply take control of him using his Quirk. Kaetsu liked his compliance. Most of the time, anyway. He seemed to be angry when Hawks drifted.

Hawks did not mean to drift. His head became foggy and grey on its own until he woke to Kaetsu kissing or shaking or striking or slicing or strangling him. Hawks was beginning to accept that Kaetsu was going to accidentally kill him in a rage one of these days. That did not scare him as much as he thought it would. In fact, it was preferable.

Perhaps that was why Kaetsu managed to stop himself just in time: because he realized Hawks wanted it to end.

Hawks wondered if that apathy would comfort him when Kaetsu actually killed him. Heroes faced death calmly, relieved they had saved as many as they could, so maybe Hawks could manage that and pretend to be a Hero?

Who was he kidding?

Good Heroes did not allow themselves to be captured.

They did not let themselves wallow in self-pity.

They did not let their captors know they had been broken.

Good Heroes did not want to die.

Hawks stared at the empty wall of his cell, waiting for it to open. Every few minutes he thought he heard noises outside and tensed, only for the wall to remain blank. Hawks rubbed his arms and rocked back and forth, listening to the bed springs creak beneath him. He shivered and pulled the red blanket onto himself, ignoring the dry patches that were from his blood.

He continued to wait like a pet waited for its master to come home and blinked rapidly with dry eyes. At least he had not cried. He had come close, but he had not cried. That meant Kaetsu would not be too mad, right?

Hawks wondered why he kept trying to delude himself.

He heard footsteps.

He held his breath and subconsciously tapped his fingers with each step.

Tap tap tap tap tap.

The wall did not open.

Minutes passed.

He heard footsteps.

He held his breath and subconsciously tapped his fingers with each step.

Tap tap tap-tap-tap tap tap tap-tap.

They were different this time.

Were there… more pairs?

One of them sounded uneven.

Hawks heard a strange noise with the footsteps.

Before he could identify it, they faded away.

The wall did not open.

Hawks waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Like a mindless doll, unable to act on its own.

Hawks's breath hitched and he shoved the blanket off of himself, hating how it lay against his bare, wingless back. He hugged his knees and rocked back and forth again.

Maybe if he bashed his head into the edge of the metal headboard hard enough he would die?

No, no. *Bad* thoughts. People needed him to live.

Hawks thought about the noise he had heard instead of thinking about how he did not want to be here anymore. The new noise, not the steps. What had it been?

His breath hitched and he stifled himself, still rocking. Kaetsu would be angry if he cried. But he would also be angry if he did not cry. He would be angry no matter what Hawks did and Hawks was going to die here and he deserved it because what kind of Hero gave up and had to not-cry and needed to be saved—?

Comprehension clicked and Hawks finally identified the noise.

It had been *crying*.

Kaetsu would not cry.

The Nomu certainly would not.

Two… *three* pairs of footsteps?

Someone else is here.

In an instant, Hawks's priorities shifted.

In another instant, they went right back to where they were as he realized why they changed at all.

The voices were right.

Even now, he never fought for himself.

Kaetsu was right, too.

He was selfish and stupid.

Hawks shoved his self-pity away. Someone else was in trouble. He had to work now.

The loss of his wings would not affect his—

It would not affect his perform—

Hawks curled up and muffled himself. Heroes did not cry. Hawks was worthless and stupid and pathetic and he deserved it but he had to *pretend* to be a good Hero because the other person was important.

He got up, wobbling on his shaking legs as his head swam. It swam because he was tired and miserable, not because he had trouble balancing because his wings were *gone*.

But someone needed his help so he had to act even though he was *nothing*.

Hawks went to the metal plate that held his chain to the floor and sat next to it. He did not inspect it, having already done that countless times. A hysterical gasp forced its way from his throat and he curled up, pressing his hands over his mouth again. Kaetsu did not barge in and berate him for acting unheroically so he must not have heard.

Hawks robotically pulled at the chain, and tried to unscrew a bolt with his bleeding fingers, and when that failed he tried to pry it up, bloodying them further. Nothing worked, as always. He looked around the room, but there was nothing he could use unless he wanted a pillow to smother himself or a blanket to try to hang himself with—

I have to live because people need me.

Hawks returned to the bed and curled up, pressing the pillow over his ears to try to block out the crying he swore he could still hear. He was useless and stupid so he had no ideas. He needed help. He was no Hero because he needed help to save someone.

*Stop feeling sorry for yourself, you stupid bitch. At least **pretend** you're a Hero.*

Hawks had some help if he wanted, but he was stupid and selfish and whiny so he was afraid to ask for it. It was not like he deserved that help after what he did. He got them captured and made their Quirks inaccessible.

It was his fault his body ached so much he did not remember what it felt like to not feel pain.

It was his fault he was chained up like a disobedient pet.

It was his fault he could barely walk a couple feet without collapsing.

It was his fault his wings were—

But someone else needed help. To help them, *he* needed help.

What kind of Hero—?

Shut up.

I'm not a good Hero.

I never was.

Hawks deserved their anger anyway.

Bracing himself, Hawks hesitantly unlocked the door inside his head.

The voices rushed out, enveloping him.

Their relief was a bit of a surprise.

Their anger was not.

Hawks did not try to shield himself as their shouts and emotions slammed into him, battering at him like gale force winds. They were all *furious*, as they rightfully should be after what he did. He thought he felt Red and Pink and maybe Silver struggle for a moment but they were lost in the tsunami of rage directed at Hawks.

If the voices had bodies, Hawks knew he'd be receiving a few punches at the very least.

I'm sorry.

"*Shut up."* Green said lowly.

Hawks shrank in on himself, breaths coming in sharp, painful gasps as he remembered Green could take control at any time. Hawks would let him too. He had to let him because he would not be selfish now.

Green's anger doubled and Hawks forced himself to keep breathing. In and out and in and out and in and out—

"*You **idiot**."* White said, voice low with disappointment.

Hawks did not flinch, if only because he knew flinching would not help him. *I'm sorry. I should have let you out sooner.*

"Damn right you should have." Pink snapped. *"This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't shut us in."* She recoiled. *"Wait, no. I didn't mean that."*

Hawks did not try to defend himself.

I'm sorry. Someone else is here, he thought tonelessly. *We have to help them.*

"*Oh, so **that's** why you let us out?"* Yellow snarled. He twitched and Hawks felt him clutch at his head. *"Damn it! Shut up!"*

I'm sorr—

"*STOP saying that!"* Purple bellowed.

Hawks went silent. He realized he was curled up against the headboard, bracing for a blow.

"*Shit."* Purple breathed, voice ragged. *"Everyone **calm down**."*

If he tried to use his Quirk, it did not work. Their anger was too strong. How could Hawks do this to them? How could he shut them in? How could he make it so they could not help him when he needed them? They were Heroes. Helping people was their job but Hawks tossed them aside like a stupid, selfish idiot—

"*Enough."*

Of all the voices, the last Hawks expected to be the calm in the storm would be Orange. His serenity spread out through the others and a chill went up Hawks's spine. Orange was explosively angry. He was loud and ranted and swore when he was upset.

This was different.

It was cold. It was focused.

It was *terrifying*.

Hawks's mind slipped away from the outside world just a little, selfishly hoping it would make what came next less painful. A voice brushed him and he recoiled, realizing they were trying to pull him into their dorm.

No.

The pleading thought escaped despite Hawks's desperate attempts to hide it and he pressed his hands over his mouth, biting his knuckles. He could escape Kaetsu by drifting but he had no way to escape the voices. If he was selfless, he would just fall back and let them do whatever they needed without him. He was useless but they would not be.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

A voice brushed Hawks again and this time he did not resist, letting them grab him and pull him away. He did not feel another voice take control in his stead and when he appeared in UA's dorms, all eight of them surrounded him. Among them was the newly-revealed future Momo Yaoyorozu, her hair in its familiar ponytail.

The next thing Hawks noticed was that his injuries and outward appearance had transferred again. That included his missing coat and shoes. And his lost wings.

Which the voices were staring at.

Hawks silently curled up on the *fake-fake-not-real-fake* couch and shut his eyes.

"They're really gone." He heard Pink croak.

"They'll grow back." Green rambled. "There's still bone left so they'll grow back—"

"*Shut **up**,* Deku!" Orange shouted.

Hawks was incapable of making himself any smaller but he tried anyway. He felt someone sit next to him and did not move. Were all the voices still there or had someone taken control since he was useless?

Someone grabbed his arm and he let them lift him into a sitting position, allowing them to maneuver his body like Kaetsu did. Something wrapped around him and he flinched, waiting for an arm to circle his throat and begin squeezing.

Instead it settled across his back, below the exposed bones of his wings, and he was leaned against a hard chest. Hawks cautiously opened his eyes to see Orange's glowing figure. It took Hawks a second, but he slowly realized that Orange was not going to strangle him like Kaetsu. Instead he was… hugging him? His single arm was embracing Hawks.

Why? Was it a trick like the ones Kaetsu always pulled?

Although Hawks could not see Orange's features in the glow, he did not seem angry.

He was calm.

In fact, all the voices were calm. They were looking at Hawks sadly.

Hawks did not understand. Where had the anger gone?

"We're not angry at you, id— Gold." Orange growled. "We're pissed at Kaetsu."

Hawks wished he would not lie. He heard Orange's teeth grind as he clenched his jaw. Hawks remembered the voices still knew what he was thinking here. He shut his eyes again. Orange still was not yelling at him and— He flinched as White's warm hand laid itself on his forearm.— and no one was hurting him. Was it because they had to help someone? That must be it, since they knew this was Hawks's fault.

"Fuck that." Orange snarled.

Hawks tried not to flinch away from him. He did not completely succeed.

Orange scowled in annoyance but he did not strike Hawks like Kaetsu would. Instead he glared.

In the sea of orange light Hawks perceived him as, his eyes glowed red.

"Listen to me." Orange commanded. "Your wings may be gone right now but you are *not* useless. You are more than your Quirk."

Hawks's lips morphed into a plastic smile. *You're right.*

Orange's frustration made him physically recoil. "You don't believe me. You're just agreeing. Figures."

Hawks should apologize but apologies made people mad. He lowered his gaze instead and forced himself to think. *Who wants to take over?*

"Excuse me?" Silver asked as if he had misheard. "We are *not* taking control while you are like this."

So they *did* realize how useless Hawks was. Hawks nodded in understanding and tried not to shrink away as Green tried and failed to hide his responding anger. Green smiled at him but it was clearly forced.

"We are *not* angry at you." he insisted.

Hawks did not respond to that lie. He was almost tempted to call Green out on it because maybe then he would stop pretending. Maybe then they would all stop pretending.

There's someone we have to save, he reminded them tonelessly, because that was what more important than his desire to make them hurt him already.

Their anger flared again and he wished he had somewhere to hide.

"We're practically Quirkless right now." Yellow said as if they had never been upset.

"Quirkless does not mean helpless." Green stated.

Silver nodded in adamant agreement.

"Anyone have an idea what he's injecting into Hawks and how it might affect Quirks?" Purple asked rapidly.

Your Quirks are already gone right now but they'll come back with my wings, Hawks told them distantly. At least he could pretend he had something to give them. *I can still be useful. You can use my body—*

"We don't care about that." Pink interrupted, sounding close to tears.

Hawks avoided looking at her. *We don't have time to wait for them to regenerate.* He continued as if she had not spoken. *Besides, Kaetsu will cut them off again if they do.* The voices shuddered and grimaced at Hawks's detached statement of fact. *Red, can you use my body fat to recreate my wings and feathers?*

There was no emotion in the question, as if Hawks were a program asking and not a person. He waited for one of them to hit him for his dismissive attitude but none of them did.

"I… I don't know." Red said uncomfortably. "I normally can't make organic material but with our Quirks being altered as they have… I can *try*."

Another lie. She knew it would not work. Hawks's wings had to return on their own.

Hawks heard a distant clatter and ice tore through his nonexistent veins.

Yellow ran to the window and peered out. He swore. "He's back. He's chaining Gold in the collar again."

He can drag me around like a doll, Hawks thought apathetically. *It's what he wants anyway.*

"No. Not happening." Silver said rapidly. "He might kill you."

Hawks made himself as small as possible, which was much easier without his wings. Silver was right. He was being selfish again. Kaetsu got angry when Hawks did not respond. He

might drag him by the collar until he was strangled. Hawks could not be selfish. The voices needed him to live so they could.

He had to leave.

Hawks forced himself to his feet and hobbled towards the door, stumbling like a zombie. His legs gave out a few feet from it and he crumpled. White caught him before he could hit the floor. He did not let go, even as Hawks weakly pulled at his hand.

I have to go.

"No." White said tightly. "He'll just hurt you more."

If I die we all do, Hawks reminded him.

He made himself pull against White's restrictive hold until he released him. Hawks knew it was not because he made the stronger Hero do so. He almost wished White kept hanging on.

Hawks got to his feet again and felt the voices' eyes on his back. He took another step, then another, but found he could not make himself move any further. It was as if Kaetsu had paralyzed him even in his own mind. Slowly, realized why he could not walk out that door.

He *wanted* one of the voices to stop him again.

The realization should not be a surprise but it blindsided Hawks.

He hunched over, breaths coming in sharp gasps. Heroes sacrificed themselves for others but Hawks was no Hero because he could not bear a little pain to spare eight other people from it. The Commission President was right. He was a terrible person. He was selfish and ungrateful by nature. He was a coward and stupid and manipulative and reckless and lazy and no wonder Kaetsu punished him *he deserved it* he—

Hawks was screaming again. It was a soft, desperate sound that only grew louder as the voices crowded around him and comforted him. There he was, being manipulative *again* because he was a selfish bitch at heart and made them think he deserved their sympathy when it was not that bad, really. Kaetsu could do worse but Hawks was so weak he was already breaking. No wonder he deserved it he deserved it **he deserved it.**

Hawks looked up at the voices, not bothering to hide the— fake, crocodile, sympathy-digging, *stop pretending to cry you piece of shit*— tears in his eyes.

I can't, he confessed.

None of them yelled at or hit him even though he deserved it.

"You have t—" Green stopped. "*No* you don't." He paced back and forth a few steps, yanking at his green hair. "Okay. *Okay.*" He took a breath. "I'll—"

Red disappeared out the door.

Hawks and the other voices watched it close behind her in silent shock. Then Hawks lurched towards it, grasping the handle. The metal slipped through his hands like it was made of smoke. He tried to grab it again, and again, fingers clutching at what felt like air.

Come back, he croaked. He raised his fists and pounded weakly against the door. *Red, **please** come back inside!*

If Red heard him, she did not respond. Hawks dashed to the window with the other voices and felt his limbs shift as she took control. Red lifted Hawks's head and stared at Kaetsu just as he grabbed the collar. Kaetsu's acid green eyes locked onto hers and Hawks swore his handler was still looking straight at him.

"Momo Yaoyorozu." Kaetsu said calmly.

Red froze.

Kaetsu smiled. It was not a pretty grin. "That is your name, is it not? Or is that merely what you *believe* your name is?"

To her credit, Red recovered quickly. "I will not fall for such deceit. I know I am myself."

Kaetsu chuckled lightly. "Fair enough."

He held out his hand in a mockery of a knight helping a fair lady up some stairs.

Red punched him in the throat.

Kaetsu gave a choked gurgle and Red yanked the chain from his hands, wrapping it around his neck. Before she could pull, he grasped her wrist and head, slamming it into the wall. Everything went blurry and when their sight returned, Hawks's body was pinned beneath his handler's.

Hawks ran back to the door and yanked on it desperately.

"That was fun." Kaetsu said with false serenity. His grip on Red's wrists tightened as his voice lowered dangerously. "Now *give me my Angel back.*"

"No." Red spat. *"Hawks, don't watch."*

Hawks wondered how she could ask that of him. He forsake trying to grab the door handle in favor of clawing at the door, leaving his fingertips raw and bloody. Silver tried to drag him away but he yanked himself out of his grasp, speaking desperately to Red.

*You don't have to do this it's my body I can handle it please I don't want him to hurt you please Red please let me have control I won't break I can be useful you don't have to do this don't do this for me let him hurt me **please**—*

Kaetsu did not strangle Red or stab her or knock her out. To him, she was an annoyance or an obstacle and little else. She was not worthy of his effort like Hawks. Hawks could not be more grateful—

"Fine." Kaetsu stated. "If you want to be stubborn, then I have a present that I think you both may enjoy."

His tone was *too* calm, and Hawks had the sinking realization that his previous assumptions had been incorrect.

He grabbed Hawks's body by the hair and dragged Red outside. There was no blindfold or carrying this time, and Hawks felt his unease mounting as Red was pulled down another hall.

Kaetsu slammed her head into the wall a few times to disorient her and shoved her into a room that held a single chair. The wall in front of it was covered with darkened monitors along with the type of microphone used for announcements.

By the time Red recovered, he had shoved her down, and manacles clicked shut around Hawks's neck, wrists, and ankles. Kaetsu pulled a heart rate monitor next to her, attaching it, and a quick— but steady— beeping noise filled the room. Hawks's back ached where his wing bones and other injuries pressed against the cold back of the chair but Red did not flinch, meeting Kaetsu's gaze resolutely.

"The Commission does not know who you are, but I do." Kaetsu explained pleasantly as he carefully checked the manacles. "I've been studying you for quite a while. Not your other self, of course. *You*. The fear of being discovered piqued my interest, but it was your fear '*Red*' that was simply too *beautiful* for me to ignore. It's so sweet that you and my Angel both care for that *little bird*."

If Hawks had a heartbeat, it would have tripled. Around him, cracks appeared in their fabricated UA.

Red went rigid, expression twisting into a mix of fear and unadulterated rage. "If you touch __"

Kaetsu grabbed her by the head and yanked it forward, choking her into silence with the collar before releasing her. He paused, fingers lingering on the collar around her throat, and an irritated expression flashed across his face, almost too quickly for Hawks to spot. Kaetsu took a deep, steadying breath, one Hawks recognized as what he did when he felt particularly murderous.

"It seems we have some rats scurrying about. Not to worry. I can exterminate them easily. But while I'm busy, how about you and my Angel enjoy a little show?"

He flicked a switch.

On one screen was *Tokoyami*.

He looked awful, his feathers dirty and bent and Dark Shadow a thin, frail phantom.

His eyes were bloodshot from tears.

On the other was Kaetsu's Nomu Jiro.

She smiled at the camera, showing bloody teeth.

Red's borrowed skin drained of color and the monitor's beeping grew quicker.

Kaetsu grinned and spoke into the microphone.

"Kill him."

He broke the microphone into pieces and walked out.

XXXXXXX

"Ding ding ding! We have a winner." Twice crowed.

"Agh, this place is so creepy! Don't make me go in." Twice moaned.

He saw Dabi roll his eyes in his peripheral and sulked at him, muttering about what an awful friend he was.

"You're an amazing friend, Dabi." Twice contradicted a second later. "You really came through and pulled your weight."

Twice tried not to think about *how* he came through after several days of… stuff. He also tried not to think about the body they had left at the bottom of a river.

Instead he focused on the decrepit hospital in front of them. He had been to a lot of creepy abandoned hospitals in the past couple weeks but this one took the cake, the pudding, and the ice cream too. The hospital was surrounded by miles of forests, meaning it was far from civilization and only the most lost souls could hope to stumble upon it. Most of the windows were shattered, the side was covered in vines, and half the building looked like it had collapsed in an earthquake.

The sign out front was cracked and rotting, leaving what was supposed to be 'Shiho Asylum' as 'Shi Asylum.' 'Shi' as in the kanji for 'death'. Twice wondered if the former owner named it that on purpose because he believed its inmates were doomed to damnation. Why else would he name his asylum 'Death Fire Asylum.' Did he think he was subtle? He may as well forget using a symbolic meaning and just name it 'Hell'.

The place honestly looked like a horror movie set. Twice bet there were ghosts. Lots and lots of ghosts and angry spirits.

This place did not look *that* scary, really. There was no such things as ghosts so Twice walked confidently forward, only for Dabi to grab his arm.

"Don't rush in. This place isn't empty, unlike the last ones."

"You're right." Twice acknowledged. "We should be cautious."

"I can do what I want!" Twice snapped.

Dabi released him but despite his latter claims, Twice did not run into the building. He bounced impatiently in place, gaze locked onto the open space created by the collapsed part of the building. It looked sturdy enough. For a half-collapsed part of a building, that was. As in it probably would not crumble underneath them if they climbed on it. Hopefully.

"We'll be sneaky so we don't anger the ghosts." Twice said.

"I don't want to be murdered." Twice moaned.

Dabi rolled his eyes and picked his way over debris, heading towards a door. It was technically inside the building— or at least, what used to be inside the building— so hopefully it would be unlocked. The handle turned when Dabi grabbed it and Twice grinned.

"Awesome." he crowed as he followed Dabi inside. "You know, for a hideout this place isn't very secure—"

The door slammed shut behind them.

"*EEEEEEEEE—!*"

Dabi clapped a hand over Twice's mouth.

"The wind closed it, dumbass." he hissed.

Twice chuckled awkwardly. "Oh. Okay."

Twice scowled. "I wasn't scared."

The inside of the asylum was dark. Dabi lit a hand and Twice used his phone's flashlight, trying not to feel like a teenager about to meet a chainsaw-wielding murderer. Or a knife-wielding murderer. Or an axe-wielding murderer. Dabi was probably scarier than any murderer though so maybe they would be okay and emerge very not-murdered.

The walls were cracked and peeling, with distorted, melted wallpaper on the walls. Twice guessed they used to be flower designs but now they looked like splotches of blood dripping down the walls. The tiles were not better, consisting of a sickening brown that looked like dried blood. Toga would probably go nuts for this place. Twice decided that was a bad choice of words there considering what this place was.

He crept towards one of the dark halls, peeking into the shadows as he tried to decide whether it was better or worse that there were no flickering lights and instead pitch blackness.

"This way is as good as any." he decided.

"This way sucks!" he complained.

"What'cha think, Dabi?"

Dabi did not reply.

"Dabi…?" Twice looked around to see his companion was not there. He laughed nervously and threw his hands upward in an exaggerated movement. "*Really*? You choose now of all times to ditch me? Have you seen *none* of the horror movies? Never split the party, man!"

"What *is* this?"

Twice's spine went rigid.

He knew that voice.

He recognized that voice.

He heard that voice every day, sometimes in his head and often times out of it.

Twice slowly turned around to see himself.

His other self stared back at him, as shocked as… himself.

Breathe, Jin. Breathe. Breathe breathe ***breathe***—

"I didn't make a clone." Twice said as steadily as he could.

The other Twice startled, visibly confused. "What? No. Of course *you* didn't. *I'm* Twice. *You* are a clone." He took a shaky breath and touched his mask as if reassuring himself it was there. "Oh *shit*. I guess I created you when I had that freakout, huh?"

Twice swallowed, ignoring his pounding heartbeat and sweaty palms.

That day where he had misplaced his mask. He had found it, but he'd been *splitting*. Had… Had he not been quick enough? Surely he would remember if he split, right? Surely if he was a clone he would remember—

No no no. *He* was Twice. He was himself. He was *not* a new clone.

Twice blinked and there were two other Twices staring at him.

He blinked again and there were four.

Eight.

Sixteen.

Thirty-two—

More and more Twices filled the halls, swarming him like vultures to a carcass.

Twice heard a terrified scream.

He could not tell if it came from him.

XXXXXXX

"*Damn it!*" Dabi bellowed.

His fists pounded against the wall that he swore had not been there a second ago but no matter how hard he struck it, not a single crack appeared in the smooth tile and paint. He stepped back and lit his hand on fire before punching it, ignoring the chunks of mortar that stung his burning palm.

He forced his arm through the wall and then the rest of his body to find an empty hall and no Twice. He stepped over chunks of mortar and smaller pieces crunched beneath his shoes but he abandoned stealth, running through the halls with fire burning under his skin.

The halls of the hospital were impossibly big. There was no way they had been so winding when he first stepped inside. He turned a corner, another, a third, and found himself back at the wall he had just punched through.

He leaped through it and skidded to a halt as the floor stopped in front of him, leading to an abyss. It looked like the hallway had split apart, leaving a torn mass of concrete and wires wider than Dabi was tall. He could not see the top or bottom, and despite its position in the center of a four-story building there seemed to be no other visible floors.

"Hi *Daaaaaaaaaaaabi*~" A sing-song voice called behind him.

Dabi's eye twitched and he turned with a scowl. "What the hell, Twi—"

A hand hit the center of his chest, shoving him over the edge of the abyss. Dabi raised his hand to blast his attacker to ashes and faltered, spotting the familiar features beneath the dark blue hood.

Touya Todoroki stared down at him, grin too big for his face.

Then he was gone and Dabi was falling.

He blasted a jet of fire from his hands and hit the wall, fingers clinging to a protruding tile in an attempt to break his fall. It snapped in his grasp and he only managed to slow down a little as he plummeted into the depths of the hospital.

He hit the ground hard and heard something *snap* upon impact. The pain came a second later and he choked on a scream. He had suffered worse.

Dabi forced himself to stand, vision doubling, and when it cleared, Touya smiled back at him.

"It's really you!" the boy squealed, clapping his hands together.

The voice was too cheerful to be his past self. Touya Todoroki was never a happy child. He was quiet, and scared and hurt. Never happy. Never smiling at someone like they were the light of his world.

"What the hell are you?" Dabi snarled.

Touya cocked his head to the side childishly. "You don't know? I'm a ghost come back to haunt you!"

He wiggled his fingers with an immature giggle and Dabi's skin crawled at the *wrongness* of this warped, dead reflection. This Touya did not exist. He never had the chance to act childishly or make jokes, or giggle with the innocence of someone who did not know the true cruelty of the world. All thanks to Endeavor.

"It's so great to see you again! You were gone a long time. I missed you." Touya's smile vanished, replaced by a solemn look that felt much more real. "You became a Villain to kill Dad, didn't you?"

Despite knowing this was an illusion, Dabi found himself relaxing as they got into *right* territory.

"Yes." he said levelly.

Touya's expression crumpled. His lip quivered. His blue eyes— *Endeavor's* blue eyes— shifted to the side as they always did when he knew he was about to say something wrong but could not stop himself.

"I see." Touya sniffled, those blue eyes filling with tears. "So you're just like Dad then."

"*NEVER!*" Dabi roared, flames and blood spurting from his mouth and staples. "I'LL NEVER BE LIKE HIM!"

Touya did not flinch away from him, not even a little. He was not the slightest bit disgusted by the cobbled-together flesh of Dabi, as if his bleeding burns were as expected as a rising moon. Instead he still looked heartbroken.

"Then why?" Touya asked sadly. "Why don't you care about Mom or Natsuo or Fuyumi or Shoto at all?"

Dabi's mouth felt dry. He forced himself to swallow. "*Quiet*. You don't— That's not— You're *not* real."

The child's sorrowful look morphed into a nasty, mocking grin. "You're right. I'm not real. I'm a faker. A fake faker of what you could never be. Because you *never* cared about our siblings. You were *never* a good person. You're a selfish *coward*. The first chance you got, you left them with *him*."

The part of Dabi's chest that once held his heart stung. He ignored it. "I got out when I could —"

"And decided to become a Villain." Touya sneered. He threw his hands into the air, and Dabi finally saw himself in that warped reflection. "You abandoned your siblings. You tortured and killed Heroes. You burned innocent people to a crisp. Oh yeah, *that'll* show Dad! Congratulations, you became a monster *just like he is*." He glared accusingly at Dabi, expression twisted with utter loathing. "So what are you gonna do after burning him to ashes,

huh? Keep on killing? Burn *everyone* who disagrees with you like he does? You gonna kill Mom and Natsuo and Fuyumi too cause they didn't do anything? I don't blame you." Touya's grin widened, revealing sharp teeth. "Fuyumi wants to forgive him, you know. Even after he *murdered* you. Shows how much she really cared: Not. At. *All*."

Dabi roared and threw a blast of flame, setting the hallway alight. Touya stood in the center of the inferno, eyes round with shock and fear as the flames closed in around him. Abruptly that fear faded, leaving a resigned, hollow stare.

"I *knew* it. You're just as bad as Dad. No, you're *worse* than him." Touya bared his teeth in a cold, unforgiving grin. "Dad's only hurt one family. How many families have *you* ruined?"

Dabi faltered and his fire went out.

Touya's grin widened victoriously and he exploded into blue flames. They filled Dabi's vision and although his instincts screamed, he did not bother to dodge—

He could not dodge. The Villain had an arm around his thin waist and a gun to his head as he screamed at Endeavor, daring him to try to stop him without burning his son. But the Villain did not understand. Endeavor did not give a damn about his children. He only cared about becoming Number One. Touya was expendable.

Touya felt heat wash across his face and shut his eyes. He knew it was going to hurt. It was going to hurt badly, as it always did, but this time he knew he would not recover. His Quirk responded to his terror and he ignited, his childish, fear-addled logic claiming that his own flames would protect him from his father—

THOOM.

The blue flames encasing him extinguished in a torrent of water.

Dabi spluttered and withstood the wave but the fake Touya vanished with a scream, fizzling out in a puff of smoke-like steam.

Dabi crumpled to his knees, continuing to cough smoke and water out of his lungs as the water around him sizzled. The flood faded to a trickle and Dabi wiped his hair out of his eyes, squinting at the burst pipes along the wall. Had the heat from the flames caused them to burst from the pressure or something?

He blinked and a black-clothed figure was looming over him.

Dabi jolted, trying to ignite, but he was soaked and shivering. The figure glanced up at his face and he caught a glimpse of a black mask under their hood before they turned back to his leg. Abruptly they tore Dabi's coat— ignoring his protest— and firmly tied his leg. The movements were practiced and professional, and Dabi slowly realized this must be a Pro Hero. He yanked his leg away from them and bared his teeth.

"Who the hell are you?"

The masked figure looked at him fully, revealing a nine-dot symbol on their forehead. Their unseen gaze sent a shiver down Dabi's spine, as if the weight of a thousand stares were upon him, all judging him and finding him lacking. They calmly grabbed his leg again, careful not to jostle it, and finished tying the splint around his calf. When they spoke, it was in the voices of men and women, elders and children, of dozens of souls speaking in total unison.

"**We are…**" they hesitated. "**…*an* Ennea.**" They reached out and fearlessly grasped Dabi's hand, pulling him to his feet. "**Come. We must save them.**"

Dabi yanked his hand free. "How do I know you're not another illusion?"

Ennea's mask faced him but Dabi could not tell if they saw him at all. "**We already are a nightmare.**"

With that ominous statement, they tore the door off its hinges and entered through it, leaving the chunk of metal to fall to the floor.

Dabi had no choice but to follow.

XXXXXXX

Tokoyami knew why he had been taken to this brightly-lit maze of halls. He knew it with certainty, much like a man knew they were on their way to their execution. He was not afraid as he stood in a cage of endless white mortar with Dark Shadow clinging to his shoulders, almost too weak to float on his own.

Tokoyami had heard the screams.

He had seen the blood in the Nomu's teeth.

He knew Hawks was dead.

Now it was Tokoyami's turn to die, it seemed.

He was strangely calm about that, he noted distantly. Perhaps it was shock, or disbelief.

His skin felt cold, even beneath his feathers. Definitely shock, then.

Loud footsteps grew closer, slow and precise, and Tokoyami wondered if the Nomu could smell him. Or could it track him by hearing his pounding heart? Either way, it knew where he was and let him know it was there in turn. Mocking him, like a predator who knew its prey could not escape.

Tokoyami knew his limits. Dark Shadow was weakened, as was he— an exhausted and hungry teenager who was smaller than his enemy by at least two feet. He was not Midoriya, who could lift chunks of cement over his head with little effort. He was not Bakugo, whose combat capabilities expanded past use of his Quirk.

Hawks was dead. Kaetsu could not threaten him to keep Tokoyami in line. Tokoyami tried not to think about how Kaetsu might have threatened his life to keep Hawks in check.

Instead he acknowledged that he— Tokoyami, a teenager and first year student at UA— was alone, with only his Quirk with him. A Quirk who was so weakened he currently clung to his back out of exhaustion.

All Might himself struggled against a Nomu.

Hawks had died to one.

Tokoyami knew he would not survive a fight with this enemy.

Fifty yards in front of him, the Nomu that resembled his classmate rounded the corner and stopped.

Its empty white eyes met his red ones and it grinned at him with bloodstained teeth.

Tokoyami turned away from it and ran.

He ran as the Nomu screamed in glee and gave chase, using a Quirk that caused ripples of distortion to radiate through the air.

Tokoyami did not turn back to see what it was doing.

He just ran as fast as he could as stone and mortar shattered behind him.

Nyctophobia

Hawks yanked frantically at his manacles, thrashing violently as he used every ounce of strength he had to try to break free. His apathy had abandoned him and he tried not to wish it hadn't because there was someone he had to save. On the dozens of screens in front of him, Tokoyami was barely keeping out of sight of the Jiro Nomu, dodging around corners and huddling behind walls as he ran through Kaetsu's maze like a mouse fled from a cat.

Red had faded into the background some time ago, her terror giving way to numb shock as she watched her nightmare play out in front of her. The ghostly emptiness of her presence was almost worse than her fear as she retreated further and further inward until she barely seemed to exist at all. Hawks did not blame her.

He flinched as Tokoyami dove through a small hole in the wall, scarcely missing the Nomu's claws. He pulled at the manacles, ignoring how they tore his already bleeding wrists. The blood was not slippery enough for him to slide his hands out. The cuffs were too tight around his limbs so even if he dislocated his thumb like he had been taught, his hands would not be able to slip through.

*Ideas? **Any** ideas?*

"*Maybe I can bust out?"* Green asked rapidly.

Try.

Hawks fell back without thinking about it and Green continued his struggles before receding back into his head again.

"*Nothing. I'm only as strong as you."*

"***Damn it!"*** Orange shouted. *"Don't tell me we need your damn feathers to access One For All."*

Hawks shivered and focused on the pain in his wrists and ankles rather than his bare back. *I'm sorry.*

"*Screw you."* Orange snarled.

Hawks winced. He heard a crash from the feed and sucked in a sharp breath as the Nomu rushed past Tokoyami and through a wall like it was made of paper.

"*Ideas."* Pink rambled to herself. *"Ideas ideas ideas. **Anyone**?"*

"*What if Red creates feathers?"* White asked. Hawks pretended not to notice the tremor in his voice.

Red appeared so suddenly that Hawks physically recoiled, body lurching in response to what felt like a hammer striking his head.

"*You mean… using Gold's body fat?"* Purple demanded.

"***What** body fat?"* Pink whispered.

"*I still don't know if that would work."* Red mumbled. *"He doesn't have much and I can't create organic material."*

Her voice was wheezy with anxiety and just listening to her made Hawks's breathing grow sharp.

On the screen, Tokoyami was forced to jump down in a hole to avoid the Nomu. He plummeted three stories and caught himself on some wiring. Hawks held his breath until Tokoyami pulled himself onto the floor. When he continued running, he had a noticeable limp.

*We have to try **something**.*

He heard Red take a shuddering breath. *"Okay."*

Hawks braced himself— *It's just Red it's just Red it's just Red*— and let her have control, lingering in the void so he could go back out if he needed to. Red flexed her fingers and closed her eyes, trying to block out the images on the screen as much as possible. He felt her focus on the composition of lockpicks and—

The result was instantaneous.

It *burned*, like someone had taken a hot knife to their stomach and was cutting out pieces of his insides. Hawks instinctively moved between Red and the pain, taking it upon himself so she could do what she needed. Sweat beaded their brow and their breathing grew shallower, hands quivering with effort as they tried to create anything.

Red abruptly stopped with a pained gasp, falling back into Hawks's head. He snapped back into his body and slumped in his bonds, sucking cold air between his clenched teeth. He felt even weaker than before, like any of the meager food in his stomach had been sucked out of him, leaving him shaky and cold.

"*I'm sorry."* Red said weakly. *"I don't know whether it's the damage to your wings stopping me or I just can't do it."*

"*You did your best."* Silver soothed her.

Red burst into tears.

Hawks could not say whether it was from frustration or the grief of knowing they were going to— they could lose Tokoyami again. Her sobs reverberated through Hawks's mind and his own throat closed up, leaving him trembling in the chair as he took shaky, gasping breaths.

He opened his eyes and shut them again as the Jiro Nomu lunged for Tokoyami teeth first. Hearing no screams or choked gurgles, he opened them once more and saw Tokoyami had dove between the Nomu's legs, hiding between some upturned hospital beds. The Nomu ran past him but stopped.

Hawks saw the Nomu smile before she kept running and vanished around the corner.

Ignorant to her knowing grin, Tokoyami ran in the opposite direction. A few black feathers fell from his face and Hawks spotted a splotch of blood across his cheek where the Nomu had previously swiped at him.

The Nomu is playing with him.

He felt more than saw Yellow smack himself in the forehead.

"*Idiot!"* he snarled. *"My Quirk **doesn't** use feathers!"*

"*Great. Let's turn this comfy seat into an electric chair then."* Orange growled. *"That'll sure help."*

"*Yes it **will**. We're attached to a heart rate monitor."* Yellow's excitement was infectious and Hawks clung to it. *"If we fry the machine Kaetsu will know we have a Quirk. But maybe if we mess with it to give a false flatline…"*

Hawks hardly dared to hope. *Think you can do it?*

"*Yes."* Yellow stated.

Hawks dismissed his selfish reservations and instantly gave up control. He did not go into the UA dorm, prepared to return to his body as soon as possible. Yellow glanced cautiously down at the metal manacles holding them in the chair, then looked to the wires attached to the heart rate monitor.

Small bursts of electricity trailed down the wires, making them spark.

XXXXXXX

Norito Kaetsu walked on air. He whistled to himself as he meandered down a hall of the asylum, a tablet playing different video feeds in his hands.

The one watching the mysterious Dabi had shorted out but the other three still functioned. Jin Bubaigawara drowned in a horde of his copies. Fumikage Tokoyami fled from the Nomu that killed his 'counterpart'— or whatever the so-called 'future Momo Yaoyorozu' deluded herself into thinking was his counterpart— believing it had murdered the mentor that betrayed the righteous Commission. Kaetsu would have to thank the President for directing him to Hawks's naughty little intern before he could become another Villain and spread lies about Hero Society.

Then he looked at his beloved angel. Hawks thrashed in her chair, just short of sobbing as she watched someone she cared about scarcely evade death. Kaetsu wished he had forced her to

watch her… *loved ones'* deaths sooner.

'Loved ones.' His teeth clenched hard enough to creak. Did Hawks think he was a fool? Did she believe he would not notice her disloyalty? Making 'friends'? Creating a 'legacy' without him? That unfaithful *bitch*. She was *his*, and his alone.

Kaetsu took a calming breath and forced himself not to storm back to the room he had left Hawks in.

He had another target he could kill.

Kaetsu walked casually towards the room where the League member called 'Twice' was screaming, absently checking the device tracking Hawks's heartbeat. He felt a tingle in his fingertips and scowled, taking out a syringe and jammed it into his neck. He shivered in joy as the Quirk enhancement drug flowed through his veins, replenishing his Quirk's abilities to their fullest potential as he breathed in the fear scents of everyone in the building. What a *marvelous* substance, so much better than that cheap knockoff they called Trigger. It had to be the best gift the Commission had given him other than his beloved angel.

It almost made Kaetsu want to forgive them for their manipulations. Almost, but not quite.

Kaetsu knew the Commission had tried to instill absolute obedience into him but his love for Hawks's fear was too strong. It had overcome all attempts to squash it, even as they tried to make him repulsed by the sight of her lovely skin. It was that betrayal that pushed Kaetsu to keep Hawks for himself. They knew Hawks belonged to him, but they tried to *keep* her from him? They wanted him to *kill* her?

Kaetsu did not want his angel to die, but he knew she must be punished.

During his imprisonment, the Commission had kindly granted him information he never knew he craved. Every Villain Hawks triumphantly brought in, every photo shoot she went to, every meal she shared with this 'Miruko' Hero. It was infuriating to see the public consider Hawks male— were they truly so blind?— but it was understandable. The Commission hinted it was for Hawks safety that the world think she was a man. The world was filled with disgusting, lecherous men so Kaetsu agreed it was for the best. The secrecy was worth it, too. The Commission told him Hawks never dated or married, and he eventually realized she was waiting for *him*. He spent many days in his cell dreaming about their future together.

Of course, there was anger too. He saw his Hawks in those interviews and pinups, laid out in suggestive poses with sultry expressions on her angelic face. If the Commission had not assured him she never had a partner, he'd think she was cheating on him. He knew she wasn't — she was so loyal and pure, even now— so he directed his anger elsewhere, where it belonged, and the urge to strangle and stab his angel faded with each silenced heart.

There was anger, yes, but not at his beloved. It could never be at his beloved angel. He loved her too much to take her thin, unfaithful neck in his hands and *squeeze* until she begged for his forgiveness.

He had to admit, it was *exhilarating* to kill for his beloved angel. Fear had always tantalized him, but seeing it now made emotions well up inside him that he never knew he had. He had been a killer before, but now he had a *purpose*.

It was all for his beloved angel. He knew something was wrong inside him— He could not continue to love his angel if she was a corpse.— so he had killed those creatures so he would not hurt his beloved. He had killed that brute for attacking Hawks. He'd been tempted to kill that psychotic blonde-haired girl too for looking at his angel with such disgusting lust but she'd vanished through a portal before he could take aim. He found he disliked using a gun anyway. Too impersonal.

His vendetta against the League was *very* personal, and they needed to *suffer* for what they had done. The Commission had told him what happened to his angel. They had altered her beautiful body and changed it. *Mutilated* it. Mutilated or not, he loved her with all his heart.

Besides, the Commission promised they would fix her and make her right again.

Still, seeing his Hawks like this *angered* him.

So he would kill those that mutilated his angel, starting with the screaming lunatic called Twice.

But he would not kill his angel.

Not yet.

It was… difficult to show restraint when his Hawks was so defiled and corrupted, but after retrieving his beloved angel, he had realized that anger was a part of him. He had to accept it, or he might have to kill his angel before she could be saved.

Hawks had learned so many terrible habits while he was away.

She had allowed herself to become selfish and unheroic due to the machinations of that damn rabbit.

She had betrayed the Commission that nurtured her so lovingly.

She had let the League defile her in body and mind.

And— most treasonous of all— she played games with Kaetsu's heart.

It was up to Kaetsu to make her right again. If he had to leave bruises on that thin neck and beat his lessons into her until she fell unconscious for those lessons to stick, so be it.

Besides, he knew she enjoyed it deep down. His Hawks may pretend otherwise but she loved the fear, the struggle, and the chase, so Kaetsu would happily give them to her. Besides, his poor angel had always been so timid whenever Kaetsu showed his love for her.

So Kaetsu made her suffer too.

Kaetsu loved playing with her, leaving her guessing whether she'd be kissed or stabbed. If he were honest with himself, acting unpredictability was simply *fun*. The fear the uncertainty brought Hawks was even better. Hawks deserved it and worse after what she'd done. Letting herself be defiled by the League, disobeying the Commission, betraying his loyalty…

She was such a manipulative *bitch*.

She knew *exactly* what she was doing while pretending to be innocent.

Kaetsu could save her though. She was corrupted and mutilated and driven to villainy but she could be saved. Kaetsu had to believe that. He would do everything in his power to bring the real, demure, obedient Hawks back. He loved Hawks too much for her to die before they could be together.

Hawks would be his beautiful doll.

Forever.

The tablet he held screeched a warning.

The line tracking Hawks's heartbeat went flat.

His gaze jerked to the screen showing Hawks's room to see his angel's limp, unmoving form.

Kaetsu stared at it in disbelief, ears ringing from a distant shriek.

"No." he croaked. "*NO!*"

He ran to the observation room.

XXXXXXX

Twice was screaming.

He only knew he was the one screaming because his voice had failed him, leaving his throat hoarse and aching from his shrieks. His own face grinned down at him from all sides, piling on top of him like lifeless mannequins, and no matter how he struggled he could not dig himself out of the humanoid grave he drowned in.

The other Twices were not speaking anymore, merely staring at him with empty, mocking grins. They reached out to Twice, grabbing his arms and legs and mask and throat and pulled at him, smiling and grinning as they tried to rip him apart at the seams.

Twice shut his eyes to block out the sight and his own screams echoed around him, multiplying by the hundreds.

A hand grasped his mask and tore it from his head and he went silent. He tried to hold his head together but there were hands on his wrists and his arms and his neck and he couldn't reach his mask *where was his mask?*

Keep it together. Keep it together. Keep it together. Don't split—

Twice screamed.

The other Twices screamed.

There was so much screaming all his voice it wouldn't stop his mask was gone screaming all the voices were his where was his mask screaming ~~screaming stop screaming were/ the his thoughts or his screams or their screams was it him or them was he him—~~?

"Shut your eyes, Jin." a voice ordered.

Twice did.

Heat licked at his face and he heard a roar of flame. He waited until cool air brushed his skin to open his eyes.

The other Twices were gone. There were not even scorch marks to show they had ever existed.

Instead, Dabi and a black-clothed, masked figure were there.

Twice opened his mouth to scream as his head *split—*

His mask was shoved over his head by the black-masked person.

Twice snapped to attention.

"How did you know it was me?"

"You could have fried me, asshole!"

"You're fine." Dabi drawled like the asshole he was. He was such a good friend, getting Twice out of there. He gestured at his companion. "Ennea could tell which one was you."

The masked… person faced Twice. "**You are real.**" they said in an echoing, unnerving voice that sent shivers up Twice's spine. **"You do not smell un-real like the fakes. They had no smell.**"

Twice blinked at them.

Laughed.

Laughed louder.

He stopped laughing as he realized Ennea said he was real.

*Am I… **m—**?*

He laughed again as he realized clones had smells but those illusions wouldn't.

Laughed more and more and more and he had his mask he was fine and okay and he wasn't splitting—

Repress repress ***REPRESS*** —

"Thanks for telling me. I really needed to hear that." Twice said happily.

"I don't care." Twice snarled angrily.

Ennea did not react. Or they might have. Hard to tell with the mask and all did that mask keep them in one piece *hahahahahahahaHAHAHAHA—*

Twice backed up to the wall and clutched at his head. *Keep it together.*

"Arrrrre you joining us?" he drawled, voice slurring as he tried to *stay stay stay in one piece*.

"**We are here for the nice winged bird.**" Ennea stated.

Twice brightened. "Cool! So are we."

"I was *asking* if you, Ennea, are joining the League of Villains." Twice grumbled.

Ennea stared at them for a long, uncomfortable moment. Well, their mask was turned towards Twice anyway. They could have their eyes closed behind there for all he knew.

"**Ennea is a Vigilante.**"

So Ennea spoke in third person sometimes. Good to know.

"Okay then." Twice said agreeably.

"Rude!" Twice snapped.

Dabi was frowning. He had a frowny-frown. And a crease between his brow. Frowny frowny frown. "Are you okay?"

That sounded like concern. How un-Dabi like. Maybe *he* was a fake clone—

Breeaaaaaattttthhheeeeee .

"I'm great!"

"I'm not great!"

He had his mask back he was still whole.

He had his mask back he was still whole.

He had his mask back he was still whole.

He had his mask back *he was still whole*.

Ennea frowned. "**It is cruel to take one's face**."

Twice giggled. He giggled so much it almost sounded like he was crying.

Ennea watched him laugh, not reacting. "**We should be moving**."

Twice winced. "Ouch. Cold."

Twice nodded. "Blunt, but understandable. We need to find the birdie."

"**Catch the birdie**." Ennea murmured. Their fingers flexed.

Twice nodded in agreement and turned with a flourish. "Right! Let's—"

He caught a glimpse of a familiar black and white mask and screamed, flinging himself away from the clone—

His reflection.

It was only his reflection in a window.

Not another clone.

Oh.

Twice burst out laughing.

He laughed so hard he was crying.

"We're in a hellhole and he's been here for weeks!" he cackled, clutching at his mask-covered head. "Think he's broken like me?"

He blinked blurry eyes to see Ennea in front of him. Before he could back away, the Vigilante put a hand on his shoulder.

"**You are not broken**. **You are you**. **Take pride in that**."

Twice was so shocked by the words he stopped laughing and stared instead.

Ennea patted his arm. It was an awkward move, as if they had seen others do it but were not sure they had done it right. They immediately retreated when they was done, as if their comfort quota was up for today.

"I think that was one of the nicest things anyone's said to me." Twice said genuinely.

"Step up your game, Dabi! We're supposed to be teammates." Twice snapped.

Dabi rolled his eyes and turned to their… temporary partner. "Ennea is right. We need to keep moving before that Quirk activates again."

Twice gave him a double thumbs up. "Okay."

"Screw you!" Twice huffed.

A thought struck him and he frowned, placing a thoughtful hand on his chin. "Hey, if I had hallucinations you must have too—"

Dabi gave him a glare so murderous Twice was surprised he did not burst into flames along with the entirety of the asylum.

"Understood. Dropping it." he squeaked.

Ennea seemed ignorant to his near-death experience. The Vigilante turned on their heel and confidently led the way through the winding halls.

"Do you know this place?" Dabi asked.

"**No. We are following the smell**."

"Smell?"

"**The nice winged bird's smell**."

Twice realized the Vigilante was talking about Hawks. "Ohhhhh. Handy Quirk. Which way, bloodhound?"

"I've seen better. Are you sure you know which way?" Twice sniffed.

Ennea pointed down a hall. "**Small dark shadow bird is that way. And nice winged bird is**..." They turned to a wall and stiffened. "**We smell blood.**"

They jolted into motion, picked up speed, and… ran right through the wall like it was made of paper. Twice and Dabi gaped at the holes they left in their wake. When the two Villains followed, the Vigilante was already gone.

XXXXXXX

Tokoyami had long since lost track of how long he had been running. A strained whistling sound haunted his every step as he stumbled through too-bright halls. His throat and chest burned like he'd been forced to swallow boiling sand and his legs quivered, threatening to give out at moment.

He turned a corner and the floor vanished from under him. Dark Shadow clutched at his shoulders and for a moment, he thought his Quirk actually held him aloft. Then that brief reprieve was over, sending him plummeting down.

Dark Shadow clutched at the closest piece of broken floor, holding on long enough to slow their fall, and Tokoyami felt a painful twinge in his gut, like someone had taken his stomach and pulled on it. He collapsed on a floor two below his previous position and curled up, clutching at his abdomen. Dark Shadow huddled by him with a soft, pained whine.

Tokoyami forced his eyes open and instantly shut them again as light burned his retinas. It was too bright. He just needed some darkness.

Dark Shadow gave a piercing, animalistic shriek and dove for the closest light fixture, smashing it. It hardly dented the brightness but Tokoyami felt a bit better.

Dark Shadow immediately dove for another light.

Then another.

That was a good idea. The Nomu had not popped up to try to kill them so they should try to gather some strength.

Dark Shadow kept smashing lights like a rabid dog.

That was bad. If it got too dark, Tokoyami would lose control.

Flashes of Hawks's pained expression as Dark Shadow slammed him into a wall flickered through Tokoyami's consciousness and he shuddered.

Hawks is dead.

He made to rise and Dark Shadow looped an arm around his shoulders, holding him up. He already looked better, his arms no longer as thin as twigs. If only Tokoyami were so easily healed. He stumbled along, supported by his Quirk, and heard a thud behind him. He did not look back, with Dark Shadow dragging him around the corner—

Dead end.

Tokoyami stared at the short, enclosed hallway in disbelief. There were no windows or holes to squeeze through. There were no beds or equipment to hide behind. He was trapped.

He heard footsteps and slowly turned, staring hollowly at the Nomu that eerily resembled Jiro. It grinned at him with its bloody teeth and cocked its head as though daring him to do something.

Tokoyami swallowed and raised him trembling fists. Dark Shadow floated protectively in front of him, tiny compared to their enemy. The single light bulb above them flickered. Dark Shadow glanced towards it and looked back at Tokoyami. He knew what his Quirk wanted. He couldn't do it. If he cut the lights, Dark Shadow would go out of control—

But no one's here to get hurt.

Hawks is dead.

Tokoyami would join him soon if he did not act now.

The Nomu was getting closer. It was walking towards him with gleeful slowness, knowing he had no way to escape.

It knew it would win.

Tokoyami could see its smile, mocking and bloody and cruel.

Nomu have regeneration, right? So there's no need to hold back.

Tokoyami saw Hawks's pained expression. He saw Iida putting himself between Dark Shadow and his target. He saw years of nervous glances at his Quirk, of strained smiles from his parents, who told him it was alright that he have a nightlight into his teenaged years.

He wanted to hold back. Dark Shadow could not be allowed to rampage, even when Tokoyami thought he was alone.

But he wanted to—

He wanted to—

I want to live.

Tokoyami let go.

Dark Shadow lunged for the lights.

The light bulb shattered, plunging the hall into shadow. The darkness was a breath of fresh air after drowning in an endless sea. Dark Shadow's eyes turned red. Energy rippled along his thin frame and he rapidly grew, filling the hall and enveloping Tokoyami.

The floor and walls cracked under the pressure as Dark Shadow easily filled the space. Power pulsed through Tokoyami's body, sharp and overwhelming, but he was not afraid. The Nomu roared and lunged, and they met it head on.

They collided and the air around them screamed, mortar splitting and crumbling as the ground shook. Dark Shadow tore through tile, concrete, and light sources, plunging their path in darkness as they threw the Nomu through the wall.

It tried to grab Dark Shadow but it may as well be trying to fight the darkness itself, its hands clawing at the mass of shadows but finding nothing to grab. The Nomu snarled and its jaw opened, filling with molten light.

Tokoyami knew that move. The Nomu had used it to knock them out when they were captured. This time he and Dark Shadow were ready. So as light built in the Nomu's throat, Dark Shadow grabbed its and forced it shut—

The Nomu's face rippled, distorted flesh becoming human, and Kyoka Jiro's terrified black eyes stared up at him.

Then her head exploded like a miniature sun going supernova.

Blood splattered onto Tokoyami and Dark Shadow but he hardly noticed. The burst of light was more painful than any physical attack could be and Dark Shadow screamed, shrinking

slightly. Tokoyami's knees hit the floor but the light attack faded and Dark Shadow grew once more, roiling like a stormy black ocean.

Tokoyami's vision blurred and his ears rang but he shook himself, trying to urge Dark Shadow to retreat. The Nomu had not regenerated her— *its* head yet but it would be up any second.

Dark Shadow did not listen, screeching and roaring as he searched for a new enemy to tear apart. Tokoyami felt himself being dragged down the hall and panic built in his chest. The lights were out and it was dark and Dark Shadow was not listening. But Dark Shadow was his Quirk and he could control he swore he could he was a Hero he could be a Hero he could stop him before someone got hurt again—

Dark Shadow, we must retreat.

The fight is over.

Let me have control.

Dark Shadow, listen to me.

***Please** listen!*

Blue light filled the hall.

Dark Shadow shrank to a manageable size, leaving Tokoyami panting. He collapsed next to the Nomu's body. Dark Shadow clung to his shoulder, pale eyes round with worry.

"I'm fine." Tokoyami gasped. "Thank—"

He looked up and recognized his 'rescuers' in an instant.

He had seen these men on the news.

The Villain Twice was standing in the hallway.

The Villain Dabi was beside him, blue eyes wide as he gaped at the fallen Nomu.

Suddenly, so much made sense.

Of course Kaetsu worked for the League of Villains.

Tokoyami struggled to rise. His legs faltered and when he blinked, Twice was in front of him. Tokoyami recoiled with a gasp and Dark Shadow shoved Twice back. The Villain yelped and fell on his butt.

Dark Shadow made to pursue but was forced to flee behind Tokoyami as Dabi held up a fistful of fire. Tokoyami did not know what burning bodies smelled like but he did now. He forced himself onto his feet but his legs buckled.

"Hey—"

Twice stepped forward and Dark Shadow screeched wordlessly, slashing at him with his claws. The Villain yelped and danced away as Dabi threateningly raised a flaming hand. Tokoyami gritted his teeth and managed to get up, limbs trembling. Dabi may have a huge advantage over him but he was not going down without a fight. Twice retreated to his companion's side and—

...forced his flaming hand down?

"No no no!" he shouted. "*No* fighting!" He looked at Tokoyami with an expression one may be fooled into thinking was genuinely earnest. "We're here to rescue you."

Tokoyami wondered just how dumb these Villains thought he was. He was not the smartest kid in UA, but *really*? He hunched over, pretending it was a battle-ready stance and not one of exhaustion, and glared at the Villains with what he hoped were unafraid red eyes.

"Like I'd—" He gasped for breath. "—believe that!"

"It's true." Twice insisted. His posture shifted from earnest to annoyed in a heartbeat and he crossed his arms angrily. "It really is, dumbass!"

Dabi put a hand on his shoulder and Tokoyami tensed, wary of any more fire. "Forget the kid. We're just here for Hawks."

Tokoyami flinched. He clenched his jaw so he would not cry. "You're too late. He's dead."

Twice's eye twitched. "For the love of— We're *not* here to hurt him! *Why* does everyone think that?"

"We're *Villains*, Twice." Dabi reminded him, sounding bored.

Tokoyami's slowly realized the Villains thought he was lying to protect Hawks. His breathing hitched. "Of course not. You cannot harm a dead person."

Twice stared at him in stunned silence. His eyes were round and despite his mask, Tokoyami had the feeling he was close to tears. "What? N-No. We can't be too late." The grief he exuded was very convincing. Abruptly he perked up. "Ohhhh. I know what happened! The hallucination tricked you, kid! Hawks is *alive*. Our friend probably has him now." His countenance shifted again and he crossed his arms with a glare. "You'd better believe us. We ain't lying."

Tokoyami's burst of relief— *Hawks is alive*— was ruthlessly quashed when he realized the implications of this new problem. If a member of the League truly had Hawks, he was a hostage. So were Twice's 'reassurances' actually threats to stay in line or cause Hawks's death for real?

Tokoyami could not take that risk. He raised his hands in surrender. "Don't hurt him."

Twice blinked. "What?" He stamped his foot childishly. "We are *not* going to hurt the Birdie!"

Again, he sounded so offended. Tokoyami wondered how this Villains could keep lying to his face like that. It was disturbing how good of an actor he was.

"You're with the League of Villains." he said flatly.

"Right now we're with the League of 'Making Sure Birds Don't Die.'" Twice claimed. "We call it the 'Bird Protection Initiative'!"

"No we don't. That name's stupid." Twice snapped in a lower, more annoyed voice.

"Enough." Dabi interjected sharply. Icy— familiar— blue eyes stared at Tokoyami and he felt a chill. He had seen those eyes somewhere before. "Here are your choices, Hero-wannabe—" Tokoyami tried not to bristle. He must not have succeeded since Dabi smirked. "You can come with us to Hawks or can wander around on your own and hope you don't run into another mindscrew."

"Mindscrew?" Tokoyami asked guardedly.

Dabi rolled his eyes. "You thought Hawks was dead for a reason, right?"

Tokoyami did not have a response to that. His mind whirled with thoughts as he tried to figure out what the hell his world had become. He'd been captured, Hawks was dead but actually not dead at all— *In hindsight, I should have known better than to assume that blood was his… Was that screaming an auditory illusion as well?*— and now Villains were claiming to be allies.

He was a Hero. Heroes never worked with Villains.

But… Heroes worked to save people. And if Hawks was in trouble…

Tokoyami's beak clicked shut and he nodded sharply.

Dabi's grin did not make him feel better. "Excellent. Let's leave that and move on, shall we?"

Tokoyami blinked and remembered the Nomu. His gaze jerked to it in alarm but it was still on the floor. If it was a hallucination it would have faded already, right?

Its head was still gone.

Why hadn't the Nomu regenerated yet?

Tokoyami stared at it and waited for the Nomu to grow its head back and get up.

Why… Why wasn't it getting up?

It should be getting up. The Nomu all had regeneration implanted into them during the experiments that turned them into Nomu from the humans they once were—

Tokoyami's throat closed up and ice shot through his veins, leaving him numb. Dark Shadow wailed, claw-like, bloody fingers twitching. Tokoyami stared at the fallen Nomu that was not regenerating and getting up, eyes round.

I killed someone.

He had blood on him. Dark Shadow had blood on him too. Tokoyami's breathing hitched. Hands landed on his shoulder and he shrank in on himself.

Dabi retreated, watching Tokoyami's quiet breakdown expressionlessly. "You did what you had to."

Tokoyami flinched and turned his head away. "I don't want to hear that from *you*."

Dabi did not reply. He just shrugged and began to walk down the hall. Twice glanced hesitantly at Tokoyami and followed, leaving him with no choice but to do the same.

Of course they did not care what Tokoyami had done.

These men were killers.

Now he was too. In comparison to that, working with Villains almost did not seem that terrible.

I killed someone.

At least the Villains were kind enough to pretend Tokoyami was not crying as they fled.

Behind them, the body of the Nomu faded away.

Thanatophobia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Playing dead was disturbingly easy when one could give up control of their body. People often said Hawks's eyes looked dead when he drifted, and now he could use that to his advantage. The screeching beep of the flat-lining heart monitor sent shivers up his currently nonexistent spine—***Not*** *thinking about that.*— but Hawks was oddly at ease as he waited.

Perhaps it was because this was it. Either they escaped now or Kaetsu might just be angry enough to beat Hawks to death. That latter option was unacceptable since Tokoyami would die. He was still on the screen, fleeing from Future Jiro's Nomu, and Hawks was sitting here *waiting*.

Hawks had to get out.

He *had to* get out.

He would.

Even if Kaetsu tried to check his pulse first, he would be able to shock him.

Hopefully.

No, he *would*.

For them, he had to.

He felt so weightless. The connection to his body was there but it was as faint as a feather brushing his consciousness— *Don't think about that.* Without someone filling in to make his body act, he felt more detached than ever. Yet he could not retreat to the warmth of the voices' dorms. He might not be able to make himself leave. When Kaetsu arrived he needed to be ready.

"You can beat him." White said.

Hawks almost wished he could believe him.

The door to the observation room crashed open, hitting the wall with a bang. Hawks heard Kaetsu inhale sharply before giving a distressed cry. Something clattered to the floor and rapid footsteps approached. Hawks currently did not have the ability to tense his body, which was probably a good thing considering that would give him away—

Warm fingers touched Hawks's neck and his mind went blank.

All thoughts about using Yellow's Quirk abandoned Hawks and he froze inside his mind as the blackness became a static-filled grey. Someone screamed at him to move and he distantly

recognized them as the voices. That realization pierced the haze but clarity did not return to him. Only fear. All Hawks could think about was the hand around his throat, a hand that would soon start squeezing and choking and hurting until Hawks gave up and stopped moving he couldn't do this he couldn't do this *he couldn't—*

To Hawks's surprise, Kaetsu did not strangle or slap or scream at him for trying to trick him. It was like he couldn't feel Hawks's panicked pulse beneath his fingers. Was that pulse only Hawks's imagination since he was sunk into his head? Or could it be Kaetsu's fear was losing Hawks? He might be surprised if he did not know it was out of possessiveness.

No matter the reason, Hawks's drifting seemed to work as his detachment from his body left him seemingly lifeless.

"No no *no*." Kaetsu moaned. "What did you *do*?"

The anger in his voice was too familiar for Hawks to delude himself into thinking Kaetsu was furious at himself. Even when Hawks was 'dead,' it was his fault.

Kaetsu undid the manacles, pulling Hawks roughly into his arms like an angry child grabbed an unresponsive pet. Even while he was jostled, Hawks remained limp and lifeless as he let Kaetsu lay him on the floor. He waited for Kaetsu to lean close and felt breath tickling his cheek.

Hawks's eyes snapped open and he punched Kaetsu directly in the throat.

Hard.

Kaetsu hunched over with a choking cough and Hawks followed it with a kick to his handler's gut. Kaetsu fell backwards and his head clipped the edge of a manacle, leaving a smear of blood.

Hawks shoved himself into a sitting position and stared at him, breathing heavily as he waited for Kaetsu to rise and lunge for him again.

He didn't.

He was unconscious.

It was so… *easy*.

It's your fault you didn't fight sooner. You did this to yourself.

Hawks shoved away those thoughts and pushed himself into a standing position. Pain shot up his right leg and his knees buckled. He caught himself on the chair, limbs quivering. He tried to put his weight on his leg and nearly bit through his lip.

"I think your ankle is broken." Green fretted.

Is that your expert observation, Lord Bone Breaker? Hawks thought faintly.

He grabbed Kaetsu's limp arm and— *quickly move quickly get out of reach before he wakes up*— dragged him into the chair he had just vacated, locking him in. It might not do anything considering his Quirk but Hawks could at least try to slow him down. He immediately exited the room and entered the hall.

The first thing he noticed was the design on the walls. The pattern of the tiles was a nauseating sight, making the area appear to twist and move like it was alive. Hawks tried not to look at them as he hobbled along, using the wall for support. It was pathetically slow but he kept moving, pushing through the pain in his leg.

The lights flickered on and off, plunging the world into darkness too quickly for his eyes to adjust, one that anything could pop out of. Maybe he should have White use some fire to—

Hawks remembered his bare back and clapped a hand over his mouth. Whether it was to muffle a laugh or sob, he could not say. He swallowed whatever it was and dragged himself along. The pathway seemed to go on forever, splitting into a hundred rooms. A glance inside showed there were no windows. Were they underground?

This place is too big. We'll never find Tokoyami at this rate.

"*I can fight her— **it**."* Red muttered, seemingly unaware that Hawks had spoken. Or that they all could hear her. *"I did before. I can d-defeat **it**."*

Hawks's chest tightened and he distantly recognized the signs of an incoming panic attack.

"*Did anyone notice anything that might give us a clue?*" Green demanded before any of them could spiral.

"*He passed by Operation Room B."* White said.

"*Okay. We need a map."*

"*There should be one in—"*

"*We are not going back there."* Pink interrupted Yellow.

Hawks rounded a corner, already out of breath, and leaned heavily against the wall. He spotted a sign that said 'Staff Room' but did not let himself feel lucky just yet. He stumbled over it, chest burning from the short trip from the observation room to here— thank goodness the employees' areas were close together— and he pushed the door open, holding his breath. The hinges did not squeak.

The staff room had a layer of dust thicker than Hawks's fingers. The table, chairs, and counter were all grey, and there was a smell coming from the dirty fridge. Hawks hoped it was from old food and not something else as his gaze rested on a large frame on the opposite wall, which was covered in a layer of dust. Maybe that was a map?

Hawks hobbled over to the picture and paused, gaze flitting to the plaque beside it.

On it was the name of their prison.

Yellow gave a low whimper. *"Holy shit we're at **Shiho Asylum**."*

"*We're **where**?"* Orange demanded.

"*Shiho Asylum. It was an asylum that was founded around the time when Quirks first started showing up. People were initially sent here to 'get the curses squashed out of them' but the doctor here was apparently trying to figure out how Quirks worked instead of getting people to repress them. Eventually the asylum became a place where 'undesirables' were sent to die. Some unsavory types used it to get rid of people they wanted gone without there being a fuss. If your spouse was no longer nee— er, I mean, if your brother was in the way of you inheriting something, make people think he'd lost it and get him sent here. The head Doctor was a real monster. He performed... unethical experiments on the patients."*

"Do I want to know?" Pink asked, already queasy.

"Nope." Yellow cleared his throat. Not out of necessity, but like he was trying not to gag. *"The place was eventually shut down but the doctor disappeared."*

How do you know that? Hawks asked warily.

"You know how you go on the internet for cute kitten videos and after a while you somehow end up in the creepy part where they go over creepy abandoned buildings and all the people that died in them?" Yellow acknowledged their uncomfortable silence with a click of his tongue. *"My brain bleach attempts failed."*

Hawks did not press him. He did not want to see what he had. Instead he wiped the dust off of the glass with his dirty arm. It was not a map. Hawks felt his skin drain of color as the voices' horror tore through him. They all recognized the man in the picture. The mustache and glasses were unmistakable.

"*You could have mentioned **Doctor Ujiko** was the founder.*" Orange hissed.

"*Maybe it's his grandfather or something?"* Yellow offered shakily.

"*Or he has a Quirk that lets him live a long time.*" Green said darkly.

"*Focus on what's important right now."* Purple commanded. *"Kaetsu chose this place and it just so **happened** to have been founded by Ujiko? I doubt that."*

Hawks's stomach clenched. *What are you implying?*

"*I don't know."* Purple said in a flat tone that suggested he most definitely did. *"Is it more likely Kaetsu is working with the League or that Ujiko on the Commission's payroll as well as All For One's?"* He realized what he just said. *"That explains **so much**."*

The Commission wouldn't work with a man like Ujiko, Hawks protested.

"*Are you **kidding** me?"* Orange snarled and Hawks winced. *"You're **still**—"*

"***Orange.***" All it took was a word from Pink and he stopped. Hawks felt her attention on him, and when she spoke, her voice was uncomfortably gentle. *"Gold, they brainwash people into being empty pawns. Sound familiar?"*

Hawks faltered.

He took a breath.

He could break down later. Tokoyami needed him.

There was a smaller picture frame next to the counter next to a phone. It was doubtful the phone still worked but it might have something of use.

Hawks leaned against the wall and limped towards it.

A rough hand grabbed his hair and an arm snaked around his neck. Hawks gasped for air and reached back, dragging his sharp nails down Kaetsu's face. He bellowed and released him, hand clutched to his eye. Before Hawks could run, Kaetsu grabbed his arm, dragging him back towards him.

"You *BITCH!*"

Kaetsu backhanded Hawks, sending him crumpling to the floor. The handler immediately climbed on top of him, pinning him down with his heavier weight. Large hands wrapped around Hawks's throat and he clawed at them, leaving thin, bloody streaks on Kaetsu's hands. His handler did not even notice.

One of his hands released Hawks's neck and he caught a glimpse of light reflecting off of metal. The knife cut open his cheek and Hawks screamed, out of fear more than pain.

Pink's shout echoed in his ears. *"Gold! Let me have control! I can get him off of us."*

Hawks readily fell back and she grabbed Kaetsu's knife hand, twisting it and forcing him to release the blade. His pupils shrank to pinpricks, nearly lost in the acidic green of his irises, and he grabbed Hawks's hair, smashing her head into the tile. Everything went blurry and suddenly Hawks was in control again.

Uraraka?!

"*She's here. She's not responding!"* Green cried.

Fear expanded in Hawks's chest, cloaking his heart and lungs and squeezing them for all its worth. Kaetsu grinned with bloody teeth and leaned down, whispering in his ear.

"That's so like you, Hawks. You're *weak* so you leech off the strength of others. *Pathetic*."

Hawks's mind was fuzzy from a lack of air, leaving him scrambling as he struggled to process any plan beyond *survive*.

He was so stupid, like always.

Kaetsu was right on top of him.

He could use Yellow's Quirk to—

Kaetu's expression twisted into one of pure rage, the veins popping out in his jaw and throat.

"*Stop* doing that! Heroes rely on their *own* strength! *THEY ACT ALONE!*"

The voices vanished.

Hawks felt a moment of panic before he realized they were locked inside again. He tried to let them out but flashes of security doors kept blocking him, tinged with blotches of blood red. Kaetsu struck him with a closed fist and grabbed his hair, bashing his head into the floor.

Blood dripped down Hawks's forehead and his vision blurred, his struggles growing weaker. Another hit left his sight black and spotty. Pain lanced up his legs as something slashed at them, leaving small gashes down his thighs to his ankles. Kaetsu must have retrieved his knife. Hawks was surprised he had not been viciously stabbed yet. Even in a flurry of rage, Kaetsu's training had a hold on him. He did not want to kill Hawks. He just wanted to hurt him as much as possible.

The wounds would not be immediately fatal. If they remained untreated, however…

Hawks's feeble grasp on consciousness focused and he realized Kaetsu was pinning him down again.

One arm was across Hawks's throat. The other was up his shirt.

Hawks stopped struggling and went limp.

Just let it happen. He flinched. *It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.*

"I knew it." Kaetsu said, eerily calm.

Hawks wondered what delusion had claimed his handler now.

It was tempting to just let go and hope he drifted. But if he did, would the voices come out —?

And there he went *again*.

Fighting for others.

Thinking of others.

Protecting others.

While letting himself fall and burn.

Laughter bubbled in Hawks's throat and he could not contain it. He giggled and hiccuped, and it sounded less like laughter and more like sobs. Like always, crying made Kaetsu angry. It took harsh shakes and a few collisions with his skull and the red floor— where had the white gone? Where had White gone, *hahaha*— but Hawks eventually leaned his lesson and shut up like he was supposed to.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it.

Kaetsu smiled. His teeth were bloody. There was blood in his hair too. His fingers left bloody trails down Hawks's cheek as he caressed it.

"Have you decided to be good now, Angel? You belong to the Commission. You belong to *me*."

Kaetsu leaned in.

Hawks shut his eyes.

Just let it happen. It will be over when it's over. There is nothing you can do to stop it—

Hawks's breathing hitched. ***I don't want to***.

What was selfless about letting Kaetsu hurt him?

Who would it help if he remained trapped inside this prison?

What would he accomplish by refusing to fight back?

Kaetsu was not the Commission. He could not slander Miruko's name or order Ingenium to be killed by a sniper. He could not have Hawks' former interns kicked out of UA or have Mockingjay deported. He could not worsen Toshinori's illness or have Aizawa arrested under false pretenses.

If he was not stopped, he would only hurt more people.

He was *already* trying to kill Tokoyami.

Kaetsu was *not* the Commission and he did not have their power or influence.

He did *not* own Hawks.

Hawks *could* fight him.

Hawks bit Kaetsu's tongue.

Kaetsu recoiled and Hawks screamed like his namesake, harsh and piercing and animalistic and grating. Kaetsu flinched back, covering his ears, and Hawks kept screaming. He jerked his head back and lurched forward, forehead colliding with Kaetsu's nose with a satisfying *crunch*.

Kaetsu released him with a howl of pain and Hawks rose, adrenaline holding back the pain in his leg. Too quickly, Kaetsu recovered and punched Hawks in the jaw. Hawks stumbled— he did not fall— and blood dripped down his chin.

"*Why* do you act like this?!" Kaetsu screamed at him. "Why can't you just be *good?!*"

Hawks lashed out. His nails— his talons— were sharp and untrimmed from weeks of being in Kaetsu's grasp, and they sliced easily through his flesh, leaving thin, bloody streaks down his handler's face. Kaetsu grabbed his wrist so Hawks slashed at his eye with his free hand, still screaming as he clawed at every part of Kaetsu he could reach.

Kaetsu was bigger and stronger and not half-starved, but Hawks was beyond a point where he cared about that.

Hawks's nails tore through the skin on his handler's arms, chest, and face even as he was shoved backwards into something that sent jolts of pain up his spine but he did not stop. Kaetsu's knife caught his collar bone, leaving a gash down his shoulder but he hardly flinched, latching onto his handler's face as his thumb pressed the softest surface it could find.

Kaetsu howled and blindly struck, catching Hawks in the head. He crumpled as his handler bellowed, clutching at his injured eye and stumbling in place like a drunk. Hawks dove for the door but Kaetsu grabbed him from behind, shoving him back-first into the wall.

Pain lanced through Hawks's shoulders and back, taking his breath away for a critical moment. One hand held his arms above his head in a vice-like grip while Kaetsu kept the rest of him pinned with his body. His remaining acid green eye glared down at Hawks, torn between rage and what could be mistaken for despair.

"You need to *stop* this." Kaetsu roared, too angry to pretend to sound pleading. "Why can't you see I'm just trying to *fix* you? Otherwise the Commission will…"

He trailed off, eye glazed and released Hawks's wrists. Hawks immediately tried to shove him away, nails sinking into the tender skin on Kaetsu's hands. But Kaetsu did not budge an inch, as ignorant to Hawks's struggles to break free as a mountain was to a bird on its surface.

"The Commission is right. You're broken. Dangerous. Corrupted." Kaetsu blinked rapidly and Hawks saw teardrops in his lashes. "But the Commission can fix you. All the damage will be undone."

Hawks opened his mouth to tell him what bull that was. Before he could speak, Kaetsu kissed him. He retreated before Hawks could bite his tongue again.

Kaetsu smiled shakily at him, and gently caressed his cheek. "I love you, Angel."

Hawks felt a dull pain in his abdomen.

He did not need to look to know Kaetsu had stabbed him. The pain grew sharp and he tried to scream but Kaetsu covered his mouth, shoulders shaking.

Kaetsu looked from the blade in Hawks's stomach to his face in utter disappointment. "Look at what you've *done*."

Hawks felt another piercing pain and grabbed at Kaetsu's face, ready to gouge out his other eye. Another sharp pain left him clutching at his abdomen instead, trying to shield it from Kaetsu's blade. He might as well be holding paper in front of himself for all his arms protected him.

Another stab made weakness spread out through Hawks's arms and legs and his body felt too heavy. Kaetsu held him up for a moment before carefully guiding Hawks to the ground, laying him against his chest. Wetness dripped onto Hawks's bloody hair.

Oh. Kaetsu was *crying*. That meant he was sorry, right? The Commission was always so sorry when Hawks made them hurt him—

No.

If he had wanted to kill Hawks 'mercifully' he would have slipped the knife between his ribs.

Kaetsu was *killing* him.

I don't want to die.

Hawks must be close to drifting because he could feel the remaining strength leaving his body. He leaned against Kaetsu's chest, unable to support himself on his own, and blinked lethargically. He barely flinched as he felt another sharp pain. Kaetsu had stabbed him again.

Hawks's head lolled and he apathetically considered the bloody stab wounds. There were lots. Too many to count. Huh. That was not good.

Would the voices die with him?

Hawks did not want them to.

There was a metal chair within reach. Hawks's gaze slid along it, mesmerized by the way light reflected off its surface, and he noted it was bolted into the floor. A few of the screws were loose and part of the plate stuck up from the ground like a triangular blade.

An idea clicked in his mind and one last burst of adrenaline tore through his veins. Hawks forced himself to sit up, shifting his weight off of Kaetsu's chest. He forced his quivering, weakening arms upward and gently grasped Kaetsu's face.

He made his expression soften, lips twisting into a patient, kind smile he reserved for those he wanted to comfort. A supposed '*Hero's'* smile.

Kaetsu relaxed, tears in his eyes. "Angel—"

Hawks used all his strength and shoved Kaetsu's head down.

Kaetsu's skull hit the protruding metal with a sickening *crunch*.

Blood splattered on the crimson and white tiles and he slumped bonelessly to the floor.

He did not get up.

Hawks dragged himself into a sitting position and curled up against the wall, staring at his handler's unmoving body. That part of him that was used to fighting Nomu and Villains with regenerative Quirks waited for Kaetsu to get back up and try to kill him again. He didn't.

Hawks… didn't feel bad.

He just killed his handler and he didn't feel *anything*.

Hawks's shoulders shook. His eyes burned. He did not cry. He would not cry because of this *bastard*.

He vomited onto the floor instead.

As his abdomen tried to twist in on itself he clutched at his aching, bloody stomach, jaw clenched and quivering.

"Not that bad." Hawks denied. "Had worse."

He only had himself to try to convince.

He failed.

All the voices were non-responsive.

Hawks bit his lip and dragged himself to Kaetsu, grabbing his fallen knife on the way. He tore his handler's shirt off and tied it around his middle as a makeshift bandage, nearly passing out. He grabbed the chair, hand slipping on blood, and slumped against it, chest heaving.

"Not going to die— to little wounds like this." he said. "Right, Green?"

Green did not reply.

All the voices were non-responsive.

Blood trickled down Hawks's stomach and his chest and his legs and his chin.

His head swam and black spots joined the grey.

"I've had worse. Right, Orange?"

Orange did not reply.

All the voices were non-responsive.

How funny. With the voices there, Hawks thought he would not be able to die alone.

"Not going to die." Hawks repeated. "Have to save Tokoyami. Won't fail this time, Red."

Red did not reply.

All the voices were non-responsive.

"Right." Hawks mumbled.

He used the chair and pulled himself to his feet.

He made it five steps before he fell to his knees, then onto his front, his forehead nearly touching the foggy tile floor.

Hawks's breathing stuttered. There was not enough air in his lungs for him to speak so he mouthed the words instead.

Get up.

You have to get up now.

Get up.

It's not that hard.

Hawks crawled through the open door, leaving a trail of red behind him. He barely made it to the hallway before his arms quivered and he fell onto his front, the impact sending sharp bolts of pain through his torso. He rolled onto his back and felt warm, sticky blood on his bare back where he had fallen. He should be concerned but all he could think about was how laying like this was a lot easier without wings.

He must be starting to drift.

His body felt distant. His limbs were too heavy.

By contrast, his heartbeat sounded too loud, pounding in his ears.

It was slow too.

Hawks's eyes fluttered and slipped shut.

I tried…

For once, that almost seemed good enough.

Almost because he did not want to die. Not now when the voices needed him to live. Not here where Doctor Ujiko had been a frequenter. Hadn't Shirakumo been dead? Could the Doctor make Nomu from corpses?

Hawks's ragged breathing whistled in his ears.

He heard footsteps. Quick, then slow as they approached, unnaturally loud as their feet hit the tile by Hawks's head. They stopped next to him.

Was it Kaetsu again?

Hawks's eyes cracked open and his blurry vision focused to see Ennea.

It wasn't Kaetsu this time. It was a friend.

Hawks's heart soared and he smiled weakly. "Katniss..."

She stared at him in silence.

Then her mask melted away like living ink, and Hawks's relief shattered.

Underneath the mask was a Nomu's face.

Their skin was as pale as porcelain and far too perfect, like someone had taken a Greek statue and given it life, leaving their skin too smooth to be flesh. Their nose was slim and humanoid and their cheekbones sharply elegant, enhancing their unnerving perfection like a predator used its colorful coat to mesmerize unsuspecting prey. The only exposed brains they had was a tiny, patch in the center of their forehead like a third eye, leaving their skull smooth and bare. They had no mouth, eyebrows, or nostrils so their lower face was completely blank.

They was hauntingly beautiful in an alien way, like a statue or one of those glass dolls that looked at the world with empty, sightless eyes. Unlike those dolls, their eyes were *very* aware. The irises were bright green and filled with a skin-crawling amount of intelligence as they scrutinized Hawks, seeming to assess his injuries. He had seen those eyes before that day at the mall.

Have they and Kaetsu been following me for that long?

Hawks could not muster any surprise. He took the Nomu's features in with deceptive calm, finally comprehending what was happening. He was terrified of being like a Nomu or seen as one. *Of course* the other Ennea— the copy of his and the voices' combined identity— was a Nomu under that mask. Of course.

A gloved hand reached towards him and Hawks shut his eyes, forcing his weakening body to relax as he sent apologies to the voices. They did not hear him, still non-responsive from whatever Kaetsu had done. He could only hope none of them would know when they woke up as a Nomu.

The Nomu's hand brushed his head. They did not grasp it and twist sharply to snap his neck, seeming content to let him die on his own.

Their hand brushed his hair again.

And again?

Hawks's eyes fluttered open and he blinked in distant confusion as the Nomu dressed in Ennea's costume carefully stroked his hair in slow, soothing motions.

"**Safe now.**" they whispered.

Hawks could not muster a reply. He might not be able to even if he could. He wondered if the blood loss had gotten to him and he was hallucinating.

The Nomu touched his hair one last time, then their own bald head.

"**Gold hair**..."

As Hawks watched, their face transformed.

Their skin grew tan, the hole in their forehead vanished, a mouth twisted into existence like a sculptor manipulated clay, and hair appeared on their—his?— head, covering it with tousled golden locks. Only his eyes remained the same, remaining a startlingly bright, intelligent green. The transformation rippled down and Ennea's costume flickered into what appeared to be a Hero costume before going back to the Vigilante's look again.

When he was done, he was a Nomu that looked just like an average human.

Hawks realized he was *not* another of Kaetsu's Nomu creations.

He was *not* a manifestation of one of Hawks's many fears.

He was *real*.

And he was not just a simple Nomu.

He was a *sleeper.* He could look *just like everyone else.* He was a Nomu that could walk into a public place, transform, and attack before slipping away as a human and repeating the process all over again.

Hawks was too tired to think more about the implications.

The Nomu caressed his hair again, and if he had not seen what he looked like a few seconds ago, Hawks might think he was always a tan-skinned, golden-haired human. Why would the League create...?

Hawks lost track of his thoughts as his mind went hazy. His breathing stuttered again, becoming a low, agonized wheeze even as the pain from his wounds began to fade.

The other Ennea *cried*.

Hawks had never heard a Nomu make such a distressed sound before.

It was eerily unhinged, but also so terribly human.

Even as he lay dying, Hawks could not ignore the instinct to comfort him.

"It's okay." Hawks mumbled, vision growing dark. "It's… going to be..."

He slipped away.

XXXXXXX

Well, Twice thought to himself. *This is a situation that was nowhere on my bucket list.*

He had to wonder how many Villains could say they had ever 'dungeon crawled with an arsonist and Hero-to-be in a creepy abandoned asylum that was probably haunted to find a Vigilante and a Pro Hero'. Probably none.

Bird kid— *His name is Tokoyami.*— was doing his best to glare holes into Twice and Dabi's heads as he followed them suspiciously. The rampaging bird-shadow that protected him was equally wary, but remained close to whats-his-face— *Who is this kid?*— in a blatant guard position. Twice would not dare to have his back to the kid if he did not know Dabi was ready to quell any literal mauling attempts. Not that the Hero student and bird-shadow thing would try to maul them to death.

Yeah, they definitely won't. Cause Heroes are sooo trustworthy. Just look what they did to Hawks.

Twice gritted his teeth. *Not now.*

Tokoyami caught Twice looking at him and his glare deepened. This kid would be terrifying once he grew up. He could probably death-glare his enemies into submission.

"How much further?"

"According to the map, the security room is this way." Dabi drawled, drawing the death-glare to him. "From there we should be able to find your missing bird—"

Ennea chose that moment to return by crashing straight through the wall in front of them.

Tokoyami jumped into a defensive pose but Twice ran towards the Vigilante, who rose from their crouch.

"Did you find—"

Twice saw the bloody body in Ennea's arms and his voice failed him.

His first thought was that Hawks looked too small. There was too much red on his slim frame, and none of it was due to feathers. His wings were gone. He looked *tiny* without his wings. Not that his wings were completely gone. They could not be completely gone. They must be pretty small thought for Twice to be unable to see them on his bare back. Was the halter top always a part of his costume or did Kaetsu—? *Not thinking about that.* Hawks's wings must be under all the blood because they could not be gone his wings were *gone* oh God *he was going to be sick—*

Ennea looked up and Twice snapped out of his thoughts before he could actually vomit. Their mask was off, revealing an inhuman face with a single, open spot in the center of their forehead that revealed a small section of their brain.

Twice had one second to realize their mysterious Vigilante friend was a *Nomu* before Hawks's bloody body was shoved into his arms. He staggered, not because Hawks was heavy but because he was so light. Like a feather. Which he currently lacked— *Don't think about it do* ***not*** *think about it.*

Twice instinctively adjusted his hold and his hands brushed against something jagged by Hawks's shoulder blade. The Nomu stared intently at Twice, green eyes turning a violent red that expanded out from their irises, making it appear their eyes were filled with blood.

"**FIX HIM!**"

Twice's mind split, and not in its usual way. This time, it was caught between terror and shock. Ennea snarled— like a caged, angry lion— and Twice wondered if this was what prey felt like when it was trapped in a small space with a rampaging predator.

"Blood transfusion!" Twice blurted. "He needs a blood transfusion. But I don't have an IV..."

"We are *in a hospital*." Tokoyami snarled.

Despite his growl the kid did not move, fingers twitching madly as his head jerked oddly, like he was forcing himself not to look at something. Twice had a feeling that 'something' was Hawks's lack of wings. And the blood. And the blood covering the small bones that Twice had *touched—*

Dabi had already lunged into a room. He emerged with an armful of tubing and needles. "Do you know what to do?"

"I've seen Toga do stuff a few times?" Twice offered tremulously.

"That is not comforting." Dabi said flatly.

He began doing something with the tubing, untwisting it and checking the needles. He darted back into the room and came out with alcohol swabs, wiping them down. It was not the most sterilized thing but it was the best they could do. Weird, but it was almost like Dabi seemed to know what he was doing. Twice wondered if he had to work at a hospital before.

"What's his blood type?"

"You don't know?" Dabi demanded. "You were the one looking up *everything* about him."

"*What*." Tokoyami growled dangerously. His protectiveness might be adorable in another situation. Were he and Hawks secretly brothers or something?

Twice smacked himself. "Not the time!" he snapped. He paced back and forth, dragging his hands over his mask, and got an idea. "I can create a clone and transfer the blood."

"You can't clone a Hero." Tokoyami said. His voice was odd, low and strained like he was forcing himself to say that but did not really want to.

"Yes I can. My Quirk allows me to— Oh." Twice realized the Hero student's hangup. "Look, I can't influence the clones and make them work for me and they'll only have memories to the point of the last time I saw the original. I swear on my life I will *only* clone Hawks to save his life."

Tokoyami stared at him. He was exhausted, dirty, bloody, and a thin slip of a teen due to undernourishment, but in that moment Twice felt like he would take down an army to protect Hawks. But the kid also knew that would not save Hawks from bleeding out.

So he had to put his trust in a Villain to save his mentor.

Twice tried not to watch the kid's expression crumple as the weight of his decision dawned on him. Either he helped Hawks and gave the ability to clone Hawks to an enemy or refused and let his mentor probably die.

Of course, the kid was a Hero.

Twice knew what Heroes would choose.

Twice tensed, apologizing mentally as he prepared to knock Tokoyami out because there wouldn't *be* a choice for most Heroes.

A Hero claimed to save but they would not risk—

"Do it."

Twice went still as he registered Tokoyami's words, then burst into motion, kneeling next to Hawks's too-still, thin frame. He was so small and pale-looking, like skin laid over bones more than a person. Hawks had always had a slight figure but not *this* slight. Never in all the times Twice had seen him had he ever looked so… fragile.

Twice almost did not want to look more closely but the fact was, he needed accurate measurements.

He apologized mentally and began peeling Hawks's blood-covered shirt from his body.

With a roar that was only outmatched by Dark Shadow's screech, Tokoyami shoved him away from Hawks. Twice hit the wall and fell heavily as the Quirk latched onto Tokoyami like armor, and together they stood defensively in front of the unconscious Winged Hero.

"What do you think you're *doing?!*" Tokoyami roared.

Twice raised his hands in a placating gesture. "I have to measure him to make a clone." he explained rapidly. "I *swear* that's all." His posture shifted and he shivered in indignant disgust. "I'm not evil."

Tokoyami's beak clenched and quivered but he moved aside. Twice placed himself into the mindset of 'trying to save a life, *ignore all the blood and stuff*' and did what he had to. Ennea watched them prep like a hawk— Hahahaha, *not the time*— eyes still red.

Twice tried to ignore them as he measured Hawks's unconscious body and did his best not to feel like a creep. He did not touch Hawks's undergarments but even with them on, there were a *lot* of exposed injuries. And scars that said more than they didn't. Twice tried not to look but many drew his eye, particularly the ones in the chest area. Hawks looked like he'd gone under the scalpel a few times and Twice doubted it was by choice. And that one scar on his shoulder went right through out his back where two small, bare bones were all that remained of Hawks's wings—

Don't think about it.

Twice didn't.

Tokoyami glared daggers at Twice the whole time, still covered in Dark Shadow. He did not seem to realize he was still wearing his Quirk like armor.

Twice hastily measured and covered Hawks up again.

He felt Ennea and Tokoyami's sharp gazes on him and breathed. "Here we go."

He activated Double and made a clone.

The Hawks clone was much healthier-looking than Hawks. None of the original's injuries had transferred, and to Twice's confusion, neither had the thin, bony figure he had gained in captivity. He looked much like he had before he had been captured except a glimpse at his back revealed there were no scars. The clone had wings too. In fact his wings were full, vibrant, shining, and the red they were meant to be.

It must be the light but Twice swore the feathers had a purple tint to them.

"You are a clone." he said rapidly as the Hawks clone blinked in confusion and put a hand to his head. "You—"

The clone's gaze snapped to him and *purple* eyes glowered at Twice.

"***You.***"

Twice instantly realized this was *not* Hawks. Not the normal Hawks, anyway.

His jaw fell open. "You're that ruthless—"

Not-Hawks slammed into him and pinned him against the wall, a feather to his throat. He glared at Twice coldly— what the hell was with those glowing purple eyes?— as though deciding which vital organ to stab first.

"What the *hell* did you do?"

Chapter End Notes

In case it wasn't clear, parts of this chapter happened simultaneously with some events from the last one (which is why Tokoyami was still fleeing from the Nomu as Hawks escaped the security room). Also…

Many reviewers: *wonder what would happen if Twice made a clone of Hawks*

Me: *cackles evilly in future chapter*

Protecting You

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Today had been a bad day.

Lately, it was always a bad day.

Today had been a bad day, but it had also been worse as well.

As he huddled in his dark and lonely room and tried not to touch his burnt, bandaged arms, he thought. He thought, and hurt, and maybe he hated just a little bit.

He had gotten news that should have been good.

It was not.

He had watched the news on the television as well.

News that should be good.

It was not either.

He was not supposed to watch the news. His mother said it was too scary. But he had caught a glimpse during the kind hours where father was not home.

Endeavor had saved a child from his abusive father.

Everyone cheered for him. The news, the people on the street, other Heroes, even the Commission.

*They praised the **great** Hero Endeavor for noticing the strange bruises and cigarette burns on the child. They praised him for acting quickly and decisively despite the father being an influential inventor from a Hero Support Gear company. The signs of abuse were so **obvious**, the news claimed. How could no one notice sooner?*

***Hypocrites.** They were all hypocrites.*

Was he not 'obvious' enough?

Did the bruises and burns on his skin not tell the right tale?

He knew the answer.

*They— Heroes, the media, the public, the Commission— they **all** willingly turned a blind eye.*

He was a child, but he knew many things:

Two of his siblings were neglected.

His youngest sibling had burns and bruises up his arms from large fingers.

His mother cried every night she was alone.

His father was abusive.

Everyone would know if they looked.

But they would not because they loved their precious Hero Society too much.

He knew that now.

He had made the decision to tell someone a couple years ago, after Shoto's Quirk came in. When he heard Shoto cry and the crack of his father's hand hitting his mother's face, he knew things had to change. He had realized no one else would do anything, not his mother, not her parents, not the housekeeper, no one. So— as the oldest child— it had been up to him to act.

He had decided to approach the Hero Commission, who he heard was supposed to deal with cases like this. He knew he had to be careful, so he was. He had snuck around so carefully. He had carefully planned and compiled his case, taking pictures and making recordings of his father's shouts. He had hidden them under a loose floorboard in his room until he was certain he had enough. He had worked so hard. For years. He had thought it would be enough.

*It was **more** than enough to prove Endeavor was abusive.*

It did not matter in the end.

*He'd provided evidence of his father's abuse to the Hero Commission he **knew** took care of other abuse cases, only to be immediately dismissed.*

*It was only now— after seeing a story about Endeavor's **heroic** rescue of an abused child— that he realized why: **His** abusive father would never be arrested, or charged, or face punishment for his crimes because Endeavor was a Hero.*

He looked at the reply he had gotten from the Commission that sternly advised him against sending petty letters accusing his father of made up crimes to a Hero organization and picked it up, burning it to cinders.

The blue flames burnt his fingers as well and although his mother worried and fretted, bandaging his fingers with gentle touches, he did not care.

That was the day Touya Todoroki realized he hated Heroes. It was also the day he promised to never abandon another abused child.

Touya broke that promise years later when he left his own siblings behind.

Dabi was beyond caring.

No one listened.

No one cared.

No one helped him or his family.

So why should he help anyone else?

XXXXXXX

Dabi questioned how the hell they got into this situation. Wait, he knew how. Because of the damn Hero holding floating feathers to his throat while he physically held another one to Twice's jugular. Dabi might enjoy the bird's ruthlessness if it was Hawks.

It wasn't.

This Hawks acted with a vicious efficiency few Heroes possessed, not because he thought his enemies' lives weren't worth something, but because something else was worth *more*. Dabi was almost jealous of that iron will to protect something. Almost, because the feathers at his throat were biting into his skin.

Heroes were supposedly not allowed to kill.

This one *definitely* would, and not even as a last resort.

Th ere is more to this than a strange and protective clone—

"Wait!" Twice yelped, hands raised above his head. "We're friendly."

Purple eyes narrowed to slits. His feathers did not move from the Villains' necks. Dabi could feel the sharp edges touching his skin, just short of cutting it open.

"Like I would believe that." he hissed, and even his voice sounded different. It was still undeniably Hawks's voice but the inflection and tenor were off.

Dabi's patience was close to snapping. Two more seconds and he'd burn the feathers and the clone with them. Twice could make another one for all he cared. One that was less defective. His fingers twitched and purple eyes locked onto him in warning, as if the clone knew what he was thinking. The bird kid— Tokoyami or something— lingered in the background, obviously conflicted whether he should interfere or not.

Ennea had no such reservations.

Clang!

"**Enough**!" the Vigilante shouted in a dozen voices, shoving themself between the Hawks clone and Twice.

Their shout may not have been so threatening if not for the large metal trident in their hand, which they pointed aggressively at the two arguers. Where the hell had they pulled that from

—? Dabi remembered Ennea was a Nomu.

How the hell did a Nomu become a Vigil— later.

"**Stop fighting**." Ennea commanded in a growl. "***Help* him**."

The Vigilante gestured at Hawks with their free hand. The purple-eyed clone immediately went to his original's side and checked his injuries. His expression was smooth, almost bored, but Dabi had worn such an expression so many times he knew fear was hiding under that apathetic exterior. It looked as out of place on Hawks's face as an extra eye would.

This isn't Hawks.

Dabi shoved that thought aside to be dealt with later.

"Clone, we need a blood transfusion for him." he ordered rapidly.

Sharp purple eyes locked onto him, calculating and cold, and he resisted the urge to light his hands on fire in warning. Out of the corner of his eye, Ennea shifted their grip on their trident so it could be thrown. Dabi got the message because steel-melting fire or not, it might fail to block a seven foot conjured metal trident.

"I am not '*Clone*'. You may call me Purple." the Hawks clone said icily.

It was the kid Hero that said what they were all thinking. "You're not Hawks."

The clone looked away from Tokoyami and Dabi thought a pained look crossed his face. It was gone too quickly for him to be sure. "I suppose not."

A few things Dabi had been thinking fit together into a disturbing picture. *Shit*, Twice had told him he thought Hawks had other personalities in there. Had his mind split apart to cope with the abuse he faced?

Dabi did *not* sign up for this crap.

"What do you want?" 'Purple' said, tone guarded.

"Blood." Twice said instantly. "For a transfusion. That's all. We won't hurt him."

He sounded so damn earnest it was impossible to think he was lying.

Purple was a suspicious bastard, however, and continued to glare.

"Really?" he sneered, as if believing their word was foolish.

Dabi's patience snapped. "Yes, you damn—"

"Yes." Twice replied at the same time.

"**Tell me the truth**. **Why are you helping Hawks**?"

A shiver went up Dabi's spine and an odd, floaty feeling washed over him.

"That is the truth." he said, voice distant and monotone to his own ears. "I want to help Hawks because I know he was like me."

"I want to help because he's a good kid." Twice said, voice as breathy and toneless as Dabi's.

Tokoyami stepped back, red eyes round and feathers fluffing in alarm as his Quirk clung to his shoulders. "What did you do?"

Purple ignored him. His eyes flicked between the two Villains until he inclined his head.

Like puppets with cut strings, Dabi and Twice fell to their knees. Twice panted and heaved while Dabi lunged to his feet with a roar, fingers alight with flames. Purple casually grabbed his wrist, not flinching as his hand lingered near blue flames. He yanked Dabi's hand out to the side, allowing those flames to explode past his head, and shoved him back. Dabi stumbled, startled by the strength behind the push, but caught his footing and bared his teeth.

Purple watched him impassively— as if Dabi was no threat to him— and held out his bare arm to Twice. "Do it."

His quick turnaround startled Dabi out of his rage. Did he have a Quirk that forced his target to tell the truth or something? Wait, he was a clone of Hawks. How could *Hawks* have a Quirk like that?

Holy shit is Hawks a Nomu—?

Twice balked. "You'll die."

He sounded so damn *distraught* by the idea of the disposable clone dying. What the *hell*? How the hell did Twice not even care what *it* had done to them—

"*When will **it** be ready for training again?"*

Dabi realized what he had called the clone and froze.

As the Villain stood there like an ice statue, Purple rolled *his* purple eyes.

"No I won't. I'll go back into G— Hawks's head."

"Do you *know* that?" Twice insisted.

Purple did not answer. He sat beside his original. Or the body he was co-inhabiting.

*What would happen if Twice measured someone who was then turned into a Nomu—? **Later**.*

Twice hurriedly connected the tubes and other devices, apologizing profusely as he had to jab the maybe-clone, maybe-split personality, maybe-part-of-a-maybe-Nomu ***what the hell.*** Purple did not flinch at all, even as his skin paled and he had to lay down. As he grew

weaker, the color returned to Hawks's skin. Nothing drastic, but just enough that he could hold on a little longer.

As he took too much damage, Purple began to melt.

Twice started crying like the over-emotional man he was, and Dabi irrationally hoped Purple better be telling the damn truth about returning to Hawks. Purple's melting purple eyes locked with Dabi's like he knew what he was thinking. Damn manipulative asshole.

"Don't let the Commission take him." Purple said. "Trust no one except UA."

And then he disintegrated into a puddle of goop.

Twice gave a low, hoarse cry and looked away from the splatter he left behind. Tokoyami's feathers were still fluffed with unease but he hesitantly patted the Villain's shoulder.

Dabi could only stare as a *Hero student* comforted a *Villain*.

What the hell had Dabi's life become?

Twice inhaled sharply and wiped at his eyes. "He still needs a doctor. We have to take him to a hospital."

"Oh yeah." Dabi interrupted. "That'll end well. Him showing up after being missing for weeks, dropped off by *us*."

Twice winced. His countenance shifted and he glared, jabbing a finger at Dabi. "Hey, I know the Heroes might be trying to kill him—"

"The *Commission* did this?" Tokoyami asked faintly.

Well, would you look at that. The little bird knows how corrupt the world is.

Twice ignored him. "—but we're kind of out of options!"

Dabi could not stop himself from sneering. "Oh yeah, that makes it a *great* idea." he said sarcastically, and maybe it was a little cruel but he was feeling vindictive. "What a great publicity stunt for our villainous plans! If we drop him off *anywhere* it'll be turned into the next big story. A Hero saved by Villains? Must be a Villain himself."

Twice wilted.

Tokoyami looked disturbed but not surprised, confirming Dabi's previous thoughts. Looked like the bird kid definitely knew more than he let on.

Despite his audience's misery, Dabi could not resist one last angry jab at their stupid as hell plan. "You know how screwed up our world is. They'll never believe we rescued him out of the goody-goodness of our nonexistent Villain hearts. Heroes like Endeavor will tear him apart in a *sec*—"

"Touya?"

Dabi.

Did not.

Sign up for this *shit*.

The stupid Hero who was to blame for this fucked up mess was looking at him. He was barely conscious, his golden eyes half-lidded and glazed, and he fumbled in the air before his hand successfully grasped Dabi's wrist. His touch was as light as a feather and colder than Dabi's skin. Considering Dabi had the body meant for an ice Quirk, that was saying a lot.

"You're still here." he whispered in wonder. "Don't leave me please?"

Dabi wanted to scream at him. He wanted to shove him off and strike this *Hero* for touching him. He wanted to burn him, maybe as a warning to never do it again, or maybe enough to ensure he would never get the chance.

But Hawks was looking at him with that stupidly confused and *innocent* expression, like he had reverted to a young child who saw and imprinted on an older kid they decided to follow and admire. His eyes were glazed and puzzled but the way he blinked at Tou— Dabi reminded him of Shoto before…

Before.

It was unnerving, but the thought of snapping at him like this was…

I'm a Villain. I don't have to be nice.

The instinct to snap and scream and burn was strong.

The instinct to comfort was stronger because that's what older brothers did—

Shut up.

Dabi stamped on both instincts and kept silent.

The *stupid* bird did not.

"You're a big brother, Touya." the winged Hero mumbled. "Do you remember that? Why did you leave?"

How *dare* he.

Dabi's teeth gnashed together and he raised a flaming palm.

Ennea placed a warning hand on his shoulder, their trident still in their other hand. He would have burnt them to a crisp right then and there if the Vigilante wasn't a Nomu, with

regeneration probably included. It would not do to make an enemy of them now. Dabi begrudgingly extinguished the flame, exhaling.

"You don't get to judge me." he hissed at the delirious Hero.

Hawks blinked at him, eyes not quite focused on his face. Dabi had to wonder if he even heard him. "Did you leave because I was bad?"

Definitely delirious. Dabi firmly reminded himself of that as his teeth ground so much he could hear the scraping in his head.

"I am always bad. I trained really really hard but I was not good enough." Hawks rambled.

There was something truly *off* about his tone. Although it was childish, it was also *too* polite and careful, even when he was in obvious pain. It was almost like he wasn't himself—

Goddamn piece of shit was this *another* possible-personality like Purple?

"Was I bad again?" maybe-Hawks asked Dabi. He shivered, hands clutching at a few of the hastily-bandaged wounds on his stomach. "It hurts. I must have been bad. Why does he hurt us, Touya?"

Dabi could feel Twice, Tokoyami, and Ennea watching him. *Judging* him. Ready to be stupid fucking white knights if he said the wrong thing to poor wittle Hawksie.

Screw it, he was done dealing with this shit. Hawks was out of his abductor's hands. Dabi was free to go. Except Hawks was still gripping his wrist with that easily-breakable grasp of his and Dabi could not pull away.

Hawks kept talking. Something about training and being tired and not wanting to train anymore because it hurt. Dabi wished he would just *shut up*. He was sick of this *Hero* acting like he understood a *fraction* of what Dabi went through. He did not have to deal with what Dabi did—

"I made Endeavor mad again, didn't I?" Hawks mumbled. "I heard you. That's what you said, right?"

Dabi hated Hawks. He hated him *so much*—

"But he didn't burn me this time. So maybe he's not so mad. But that's wrong of him, to be mad? That's what my friends said. It's wrong and *he's* bad." His brow crinkled and he looked uncertainly at Dabi. "Am I bad for hating him, Touya?"

"*Am I bad for hating him, Touya?"*

The question echoed in Dabi's mind, reverberating through his skull and digging painfully into his brain until he thought he might go crazy again. Natsuo had asked him that exact question when his little brother was nine.

Screw it. Dabi was a Villain but he wasn't a complete monster.

"*No*. There's *no* reason for him to hurt you." Dabi growled harshly, giving this stupid Hero the same answer he gave his little brother. "There's no damn excuse. I…"

Hawks blinked at him. Slowly. Confusingly. *Childishly*.

Screw it all, it wasn't like he would remember this.

"I'll protect you." Dabi lied.

He only said it to make the stupid Hero shut up. This was so damn stupid. Why the hell was this asshole Hero looking at him like he knew who Dabi was? He didn't know *anything*.

Golden eyes widened. They were almost *adoring*, like Dabi was his damn Hero.

What the ***fuck***.

"You won't let him hurt me?" Hawks mumbled.

Dabi gritted his teeth and struggled not to roll his eyes. "No."

Hawks beamed. His face was as pale as snow, blood covered his chin, bruises marked his neck, and there were gashes on his cheeks, but he still fucking *smiled*.

Dabi was a Villain. An arsonist. A murderer.

Yet here someone was, looking at *him* like he was fucking All Might himself.

That comparison should hurt more than it did.

"Okay." Hawks sighed.

His body jerked and Dabi instinctively grasped his hand. Sharp fingernails dug into his hand, drawing blood, and Hawks's jaw clenched with pain.

Frantic golden eyes locked onto cold blue and Hawks's chest heaved as he struggled for breath.

"Don't let them take me." he pleaded.

A shudder passed through his body, his grip went lax, and his cloudy eyes finally slipped closed.

Dabi almost hoped they wouldn't open again.

Almost, because if Hawks died, this waste of time would all be for nothing.

Dabi *didn't care*. He was only here because he owed Hawks one. After this, his debt was paid and he could happily burn this bird to ashes.

Dabi raised his head and glared at his audience, daring any of them to say a single word.

Only the Hero kid had the decency to look away.

"What are you going to do now?" he asked faintly, as if he had surpassed his ability to feel anything at the moment except utter exhaustion.

Dabi was tired of emphasizing with Heroes and decided to glare at him. The Hero-wannabe kid's feathers fluffed up aggressively and he glared back. He was thin and ragged but doing his best to look intimidating. It was almost funny.

"Are you going to take us to your boss now?" Tokoyami challenged.

Dabi's glower became a sneer. "Like you could stop us."

He felt some vicious glee as the Hero kid's feathers fluffed up further, his Quirk growling in warning as if Dabi could not make it flee with a lazy flick of flame. Next to the kid, Ennea had gone rigid, as if they'd seen Medusa and been turned to stone.

"Mission…?" they whispered hoarsely, voice low and gravely.

"*No*." Twice snapped. He glowered at Dabi and— to his surprise— gave him an angry jab to the chest. "Don't even *joke* about that. You know what the boss would do to them!" His posture shifted, straightening angrily. "Bossman's *not getting near 'em*, you hear me?"

Dabi didn't get why he was so worked up. Was he still upset about those Heroes they handed over earlier? What a pain. He raised his hands in mock surrender. "Fine. Relax, it was just a joke."

Ennea released a shuddering gasp of air and relaxed. In hindsight, joking about bringing Hawks to someone who would harm him in front of the Vigilante was a bad idea. Whatever.

"**We must take them to a safe place**." they said. As Dabi watched, the trident in their hand vanished and their mask reformed over their face. They seemed ignorant to how the Hero kid's eyes went wide. "**Ennea will drop nice winged bird and small shadow bird off**. **Ennea is a Vigilante**."

"Is that what—" Tokoyami cleared his throat. "I mean, who you are?"

Ennea tipped their head. "**Ennea is not us originally**. **In truth, we are**…" Their mask flickered and Dabi thought he caught a glimpse of green eyes again. "**We have been called 'Retiarius'**. **We cannot be Retiarius for this, so we have borrowed another's identity**. **For them, we will be Ennea**."

That made no sense but Dabi was beyond caring. He had surpassed the threshold of giving a shit and lingered somewhere between apathy and the desire to say screw it and just burn all his problems.

The latter desire was growing because they were all looking to *him* for the final decision. How did he become the one who had to decide what to do with a Hero that was more trouble than he was worth?

Dabi realized that 'Ennea' or 'Retiarius' or whatever the hell they was called had given him a nice out. He could leave Hawks and the Hero kid to the Vigilante and leave. All he had to do was wash his hands of the situation and maybe burn whoever had captured them both as revenge for those damn mind tricks he tried to pull—

Endeavor would leave him. There still could be an enemy to catch, after all.

That's what Dabi told himself was the reason he hesitated. He would not shed a tear if the stupid Hero died or was seen as a Villain by the corrupt system he had been groomed to die for.

But if Dabi left now to hunt rather than help, he'd be an Endeavor. Screw that notion. He was acting out of spite, nothing more. He would help this Hero, repay his debt, and be a better 'Hero' than his father would ever be.

What a hilarious thought.

This whole situation was a fucking *joke*.

"Fine. Call Spinner. We need a ride."

XXXXXXX

Spinner was pretty sure he had played a horror video game that started with this kind of scenario. Here he was, sitting in a van in the middle of the woods at night, with his headlights barely piercing the thick mist around him. When he looked up he could kind of see the night sky through the fog but it was completely black without a single star to hold back the abyss.

He nervously tapped his fingers on the steering wheel, too uneasy to turn on the radio for some music. The van he had *borrowed* was running but it was too loud, the headlights like a beacon calling everything in the quiet woods to his location. Anything could be out there, and unlike in a video game he would not respawn if something like a bear or demon decided to eat his guts.

Spinner slouched down in the driver's seat of the van as though doing that would prevent and horrible creatures of the night from murdering him. Then again, some people saw him and thought he would be one of those monsters so he was not one to talk.

Why was he out here again?

Oh right. Twice.

A frantic call from his fellow League member— Spinner was cautious to consider him a friend— demanding he come to his location was all Spinner needed to grab his keys— well, they were someone else's keys and car but that was not the point. He had gone out with no details and no confirmation that this wasn't some type of trap laid out by the Heroes or something.

In hindsight, not his wisest move. Really, there were all these bad and murdery reasons why Twice could have called him out here. Maybe Twice was dead and some demon had used his

voice to trick Spinner into coming out here, in the woods in the middle of nowhere where every shadow could be a—

Thud.

A body landed on the hood of the van and Spinner screamed. A black mask leaned in, almost pressing against the windshield and he screamed louder. Before he could put the car into reverse, the person leaned back, balancing delicately on the hood as casually as they would on solid ground.

"**You are Spinner**." they said in a demonic cacophony of overlapping voices that sent a shiver down his spine.

He blinked and they were gone.

Spinner stared at the empty space the possibly-demon had occupied and heard the unmistakable sound of abused, breaking metal behind him. He spun in his seat, clambering with his seatbelt in an attempt to release it as the masked definitely a demon yanked the locked back door open. The demon's mask turned towards him and he froze in place.

"*No, Ennea!* What are you doing?"

Spinner had never been so relieved to hear Twice's voice before. His friend appeared at the back of the van and detached the probably not a demon's gloved hand from the handle. Spinner could see imprints where their fingers had bent the metal.

The masked head cocked to the side in an almost childish manner. "**The door was locked**."

"You could have *asked* Spinner to unlock it." Twice groaned. His posture shifted into a brighter, cheerful one. "Spinner, meet our Vigilante kinda-friend, Ennea— also called Retiarius."

Spinner stared blankly, slowly lifted his hand, and waved.

Ennea waved back once and— as though they had reached their required quota for niceties for the day— dropped their hand to their side. "**Start the car. We need to hurry. Hawks is dying.**"

"What?!"

Dabi appeared at the back of the van, carrying a blond-haired figure, with a teenager with a bird head carrying… *his?*—Spinner was pretty sure it was a guy— feet. It was easy to recognize that bird kid from UA's Sports Festival.

Ironically, it took longer to recognize the Winged Hero because his wings were *gone*. As Dabi carefully maneuvered him into the back of the van, Spinner caught a glimpse of the exposed bones on Hawks's back. They set Hawks down, revealing more bloody bandages covering his stomach.

Spinner turned away, gripping the steering wheel as his tail wrapped itself tightly around his waist. A hand grasped his and he looked up to see Twice next to him. The other Villain squeezed his hand once in silent support and let go. Spinner was not sure he appreciated it.

"Please tell me you didn't kidnap a Hero." he said as steadily as he could manage. *And do that to him.*

Someone had *amputated Hawks's wings*.

Spinner wanted to throw up.

"*No*." Dabi snapped. "We rescued him from the person that did it."

He sounded disgusted with himself, as if admitting that was a huge weakness. For Spinner, however, a lot of things suddenly made sense. He *knew* Dabi was a supporter of Stain like him!

Still, Spinner could not help but feel a little hurt. "You had a mission to save Hawks and didn't call me?"

Twice winced. "I called you now." He twitched and reached forward, putting a hand on Spinner's shoulder as a graver countenance took over. "Trust me when I say you did *not* want to see what we found."

Spinner glanced into the back of the van where the bird kid, Dabi, and Ennea crowded around Hawks's bloody, unmoving frame and swallowed. Dabi shoved Twice aside and climbed into the other seat of the van, buckling up.

"Enough chatter." he said sharply. "We need to drop these two off near a hospital."

He gestured at the unconscious Hawks and the bird kid—Toko-something?— who was leaning against the side of the van as he breathed heavily.

Spinner hesitated. "Are you sure that's wise?"

"The Heroes might want Hawks dead but we don't have a choice." Twice said flatly.

For what felt like the hundredth time that night, Spinner was floored. The *Heroes* did this? To one of their own? Was it because of Stain, Hawks's mutations, or something else?

He did not ask those questions. Now was not the time.

Spinner shifted the car into drive and stepped on the gas.

XXXXXXX

The first thing he knew was pain.

The second thing he knew was a joyful, grating laugh.

"Well done!" an annoying voice chuckled, piercing his ears like metal nails. "Well done, Kai!"

Norito Kaetsu's eyes opened. Both of them. Hadn't one been gone?

In front of him were two men, opposites in every way. One was old, fat, balding and beaming, dressed in a lab coat with strange glasses covering his eyes. The other was expressionless, so thin his cheek bones almost protruded through his skin, his dark hair dirty and scraggly and with sunken, empty eyes.

It reminded Kaetsu of his Angel. Where was she? Had she run like a Villain after attacking him? She was such a coward. No matter. He would punish her when he caught up with her. She could not hide from him.

"You may speak." the annoying voice— which apparently belonged to the old man— commanded.

The thin, frail man shifted from foot to foot, gaze darting between his partner— a doctor?— and the floor.

"I did…good?"

It was eerie to see a grown man speak in such a soft, timid voice. Kaetsu could hardly hear him, and he was barely two feet from him.

"Yes, yes!" the doctor complimented him enthusiastically.

The man— hadn't the doctor called him 'Kai'?— stared at him uncertainly.

"You may smile."

Pale lips twitched upward into a nervous grin.

Kaetsu tried to rise only to realize he was bound to the table he lay on. His annoyed growl was muffled by the gag in his mouth. He thrashed angrily, drawing the attention of his audience.

"Ah, you're awake." The doctor removed the cloth. "My apologies for the gag. We were not sure whether you would scream. Not that anyone would hear you."

Behind him, Kai began to tremble. His pupils shrank to pinpricks and his breathing quickened. Fear fell over him like a cloak, smothering him in its essence, and Kaetsu breathed it in, eyes closing in ecstasy as his mind cleared.

Kaetsu connected information to the old man's face. "You're *the* Doctor. The one responsible for reconditioning."

The the Doctor nodded and waved his hand absently. "Yes, yes. I work part-time for the Hero Commission. We thought you were dead for a bit but it was close enough that Kai could take

you apart and put you back together to fix you up. Not that it would have mattered if you died. With a few other Quirks to improve him, Kai could *still* fix you."

He spoke dismissively, as if the death of an agent was of little consequence. With this man— Kai— it may very well be. Kaetsu studied the shaking and sweating man more closely, noticing how he kept his wrists close together like he was wearing invisible cuffs. What a *wonderful* Quirk. The Commission was wise to acquire it.

The Doctor sighed and Kai froze in place. "Is something the matter, Kai?"

Kai shrank in on himself like he was trying to vanish. "No, Doctor."

"Did I tell you to respond?" the Doctor asked pleasantly.

The fearful widening of Kai's eyes was only enhanced by the stark contrast between the dark shadows beneath them to he paleness of his skin. "I-I… No? No— I mean— I-I—"

Kaetsu watched Kai's chest heave frantically as he scrambled to figure out whether the Doctor wanted an answer this time or not. Eventually he gave up and meekly lowered his gaze. Seeing that terrified submission sent a thrill of joy through Kaetsu.

The Doctor huffed and noticed Kaetsu watching them. "Admiring my work, are you? Your remedial course had different lessons than Kai's."

"Teach me." Kaetsu breathed. "Teach me to make someone like that."

The Doctor's eyebrows rose behind his glasses. "That some*thing* being Hawks, I presume. I'm afraid that if my boss allows me to acquire it, you will not be involved in its obedience training."

Rage boiled in Kaetsu's chest and he strained against his bonds, struggling to reach up and strangle the fat bastard.

"Hawks is *mine!*" He roared. "She was promised to *me!*"

"What an adorable tantrum."

The man that entered the room and leaned over Kaetsu was rather ordinary-looking. The skin not covered by a black suit was smooth, if a bit tight on his skull and jaw, giving him sharp, imposing features. A full head of hair covered his scalp and light, glinting eyes saw right into Kaetsu's soul. Kaetsu could not see what his fear was. If he had one, it was buried so deeply under his malice it might as well not be there at all. Where his fear should be there was nothing but emptiness, anger, and contempt, like all around him were ants to be tormented before they were crushed beneath his boot.

Kaetsu knew this monster.

Everyone at the Commission did, though most dismissed him as being a ghost tale to scare Villains.

But he was supposed to be *dead*, killed by All Might years ago.

So how did *All For One* stand over Kaetsu now, looking as if he had not aged a day in years?

"I'm afraid that I cannot let you have Hawks." All For One said pleasantly. "One of my subordinates wants to keep the bird as a pet. Actually—" He smiled, revealing perfect, pearly white teeth. "—he doesn't. But I think I'd like to see if he'd try to pretend he did to keep the little bird safe. Especially since he and Dabi came to help a *Hero*."

So it was true. His Angel had been brainwashed and altered by the League. Kaetsu was relieved. His Angel was a stupid bitch for getting herself captured, but she could still be saved. He would fix her himself.

"Oh, it'll be so *fun* to see them squirm." All For One continued. "Almost as fun as watching you remove most of Hawks's wings."

Kaetsu's gaze snapped up to meet cold, empty eyes.

"Oh *yes*." All For One chuckled. "I've been watching you this whole time, ever since you were released and started killing those poor, poor mutants. Why, your second victim had such a perfect Quirk for me that I simply *had* to take it from her corpse." His smooth lips twitched. "And when you finally captured Hawks, it was such a show! A pity you did not manage kill her in the end. That would have made for a tragically poetic finale. Instead she fought you off, all while starved, stabbed, and weakened." All For One sounded amused as he mocked Kaetsu for his failure. "You almost died. Knocked unconscious by a metal shard to the skull. How *pathetic*. However, your Quirk was too special to lose. I *could* have taken it from your corpse as well but I wanted to test young Kai's capabilities."

All For One leaned over Kaetsu, his shadow falling over his bound body, and suddenly his pleasantly, *eerily* serene expression was all the handler could see.

"Your Quirk has so much squandered potential. You have barely grasped the mere basics of what it can do. You are so *frustratingly* blinded by your obsessions. You could never use this Quirk to its fullest power."

All For One smiled and laid his hand on Kaetsu's head.

"But *I* will."

Somewhere inside himself, Kaetsu felt a tug. It trickled upward, and out, and with a *snap* he felt *something* leave. The change was instantaneous, as if he'd gone blind.

His ability to know other's fears was gone.

His Quirk— which gave him so much power over his beloved Angel— was *gone*.

Kaetsu screamed.

He screamed and thrashed like a rabid animal, straining against his bonds but unable to break free and lunge for All For One. All For One watched him with a delighted expression in a

way a cruel child watched a worm writhe on the end of a fish hook.

If Kaetsu had his Quirk, he could bring All For One's worst fear to life. Strangling him, destroying him, making him kill himself and leaving nothing behind.

Trigger. Kaetsu needed more Trigger. Trigger would bring his power back.

All For One grew bored with watching Kaetsu shriek and gestured to the Doctor.

"I have what I came for. Let us depart before our latest trespasser arrives. This one won't live long."

The Doctor nodded and leaned over Kaetsu, injecting something into his neck.

When Kaetsu regained consciousness again, he was sitting unbound in a chair surrounded by pictures. All were of his beloved Angel, some from magazines and photo shoots, but most from his very own collection. He could place every one of those photos, when they had been taken, what city, the studio, and what lovely injuries Hawks hid under those clothes.

Where was his beloved Angel? Had she abandoned him again like the selfish bitch she had been warped into being? He would hunt her down. He would make her suffer. He would kill her over and over until she was right again.

Because he understood what was happening.

He understood what needed to be done.

His Hawks was captured, tortured, and corrupted.

To fix her, she needed to die.

And she *would* die.

The Commission astounded him with their heroic nature. Their selflessness had no limits. Their generosity had no bounds. They must have known what was needed to bring his Angel back, and they had prepared for it. Just for him.

This 'Kai' could bring people back from. He worked for the Commission. That meant Kaetsu could kill Hawks as many times as he wanted— needed to, to make her herself once more.

The door behind Kaetsu opened.

Kaetsu turned, rising from his seat, but it was not All For One, the Doctor, or his beloved Angel crawling back to beg for his forgiveness. He would gladly forgive her if she came back to him. He would forgive her and hold her in his arms as he put his knife through her throat.

But it was not his Angel.

A figure stood in the doorway, clothed completely in black. Kaetsu had read the reports. He knew who this must be. The Commission had only gotten one image, but the body armor

matched well enough.

This must be that black-clothed Vigilante, 'Ennea'.

Though he did not know Ennea was a brown-haired woman. Nor that she used a bow and arrow.

Kaetsu smiled.

"Are you here to arrest me, Vigilante?" he mocked. He laughed. "The Commission won't let it last this time."

Ennea stepped into the room. Her grey eyes flicked over the photos around them, settling on a photo of Hawks's bare, wingless back. In an instant, her bow was drawn, an arrow locked in place.

"Where is Hawks?" she growled.

Kaetsu barely noticed the arrow, lips twisting as he bared his teeth and tried to contain his rage. "With her Villain friends. They *stole* her from me." He leaned back and crossed his arms. "The Commission knew she was a traitor. If she bleeds out quickly enough, maybe they'll turn her into a real Nomu this time. But don't worry." He smiled widely. "I'll get her back. And *I'll make her the Hero the Commission bought for me*."

Ennea said nothing. Her bow lowered slightly.

He mockingly held out his wrists for handcuffs.

"Go ahead, Vigilante. Bring me in. It'll make finding her even easier."

Ennea stared at him, expression blank and cold. He should have been able to know her fear. He needed Trigger. His Quirk was being faulty. Her lack of visible reaction was irksome, like needles under his skin, and he cocked his head impatiently.

"I'm waiting, *Vigilante*. Take me to my paper cell."

Finally, her expression changed.

Her grey eyes grew icy.

Her face hardened.

The bow went back up and an arrow was pointed at his face.

Kaetsu smirked. "You won't—"

The arrow went straight through his head.

XXXXXXX

It was two thirty-eight on a Sunday morning in August when the Winged Hero Hawks and Fumikage Tokoyami were dropped off at Mustafu General Hospital by the Vigilante known as Ennea.

The Vigilante disappeared before they could be apprehended.

No police pursued.

Tokoyami was taken in for stitches and an IV drip.

Hawks was taken into critical.

Calls were made.

It was two fifty-two when Recovery Girl, Eraserhead, Present Mic, and All Might arrived.

She immediately went into the operating room where the doctors were working to save Hawks while the other three stood outside and refused to leave.

It was three twenty-one when Tokoyami's parents arrived with two undercover Pro Heroes and five other UA teachers; Midnight, Snipe, Ectoplasm, Power Loader, and Vlad King.

The Tokoyami parents rushed to their sleeping son's side and waited.

It was three-nineteen when Fatgum arrived with Suneater, Lemillion, and Nejire-chan and they all joined the vigil outside the operating room door.

It was three forty-two when Miruko arrived.

She had to be restrained by Fatgum but was eventually convinced to remain with the other Heroes standing guard outside of the operation room.

It was five thirty-eight when Recovery Girl and the doctor emerged and declared Hawks was stable.

It was five thirty-eight when Miruko had to be physically stopped from rushing into the room again and reminded to be careful.

She might have kicked Aizawa for that, but no one said anything, not even him.

It was five thirty-nine when she, Aizawa, and Toshinori took their vigil inside Hawks's hospital room as the other Heroes continued to stand guard.

It was five forty when a few people excused themselves from the worried but hopeful group and made some more calls.

It was five forty when the Commission was told that Hawks was still alive.

Chapter End Notes

NOTICE: The period containing the Warnings detailed in CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE is now over.

Open Your Eyes

Chapter Notes

> NOTICE: The period containing the Warnings detailed in Chapter Thirty-Three is now over.

Aizawa was exhausted. He was usually exhausted but now he was dead on his feet. With the emergence of Hawks and Tokoyami, weeks of stress and fear had passed on, leaving him empty. And he wasn't even done yet.

Beside him, Miruko ricocheted between nearly falling asleep and sitting ramrod straight, eyes wild as she constantly scanned the room for any sign of trouble. On his other side, Toshinori waited, spending more time with his head in his hands than looking around the room.

The room was quiet and oppressive, filled only with the sound of the monitor tracking Hawks's heartbeat. He was still unconscious and kept under by painkillers which were carefully tracked and administered by Recovery Girl herself. His normally tan skin was as pale as the sheets he lay on, his lashes and the markings around his eyes unnervingly dark against them, like someone had painted a corpse—

Aizawa stopped that train of thought and listened to the endless beeping.

It *had* to remain endless.

Beep… Beep… Beep...

Aizawa wanted to check on Tokoyami but Recovery Girl feared that the weakened state of Hawks's body may cause him to have a devastating Quirk outburst. Aizawa could not exclude that possibility since they knew nothing about what he and—as only Aizawa himself knew—Hawks's 'voices' had done to make their Quirks do that. There could be a defense mechanism, especially if one of Aizawa's students unexpectedly woke in control and panicked. Who knew what they had experienced while Kaetsu had them all?

Aizawa should have tried to have Hawks train that golden light Quirk ability sooner. He should have insisted Hawks stay with him and Eri. He should have demanded to know what Kaetsu was capable of so he could warn his students' undercover Hero guards.

Should have, should have, should have.

Should have but did not.

There was little point in regretting it now.

So Aizawa sat with Toshinori and Miruko as they watched Recovery Girl check Hawks over again and make sure his wounds had not reopened. The places Hawks had been stabbed were unnervingly premeditated. The number of wounds suggested rage but the placement said every stab had been carefully positioned in an almost surgical way to ensure that Hawks would survive a while without medical assistance. Kaetsu wanted him to suffer and likely knew that Hawks would not be left to bleed out. Had the Commission been on its way to retrieve him? Probably.

And then there were Hawks's wings.

Or more accurately, his current lack of them. There were only two small bones left that barely protruded out his back. Underneath the hospital gown, they were not even visible. Was Aizawa even needed here since Hawks had told him his and his 'friends' Quirks were mostly in his wings?

Kaetsu ***cut his wings off*** .

Aizawa grasped his arm and tried to imagine someone removing it solely to hurt him. He shivered, closed his eyes, and immediately opened them as bloody images imprinted themselves in his mind. He averted his gaze as Recovery Girl carefully moved the bandages that had been covering the exposed bones at Hawks's back.

Miruko made a small retching sound. Before Aizawa could grab a trash can, she waved him away.

"I'm fine."

She clearly wasn't. Her dark skin had an unhealthy tinge. Nowhere nearly as bad as Hawks's ashen, clammy skin but enough for Aizawa to tell she was close to passing out. Toshinori hid his face in his hands again. Recovery Girl covered the exposed bones again and stood back, expression grim.

Aizawa forced himself to ask what they all were thinking. "Are they permanently…?"

Recovery Girl was already shaking her head. "They will grow back eventually. I cannot say how long it will take considering the trauma involved."

Aizawa frowned. "Are you saying Hawks might subconsciously repress his own Quirk's regenerative properties?"

Miruko sat upright with a glower.

Recovery Girl jabbed her in the leg with her cane. "Don't give me that look, young lady. I do not mean it as an accusation or insult. These things happen."

Miruko's ears went flat. "Yeah." she said tonelessly. "These things happen."

This time Recovery Girl patted her knee. "Again, it was not an insult, Miruko. Although we do not know the details of Hawks's captivity just yet, we can infer some things and… well,

pardon my bluntness but it would be wise to affirm to Hawks that any 'slow' progress is not because of some failure on his part. He will be feeling guilty enough as it is."

Miruko's expression twisted and she glared at them. It might be more intimidating if not for the blatant quivering of her jaw as if she were trying not to look upset. Or maybe scream at them. "He's going to UA after this, isn't he?"

Toshinori and Recovery Girl said nothing, leaving it to Aizawa.

"Yes. For his safety."

Miruko locked gazes with him. "Hawks isn't a child like Eri. But he's still going to think he's being punished."

Toshinori winced.

Aizawa kept his expression stoic. "We'll do our best to convince him otherwise."

Miruko's silence told him how much she believed in that.

The beeping of her phone startled all of them enough that Toshinori turned into All Might. Aizawa glowered at him— barely refraining from using his Quirk— and he sheepishly returned to his emancipated form.

Miruko glanced at the number and answered the call. "Mockingjay." There was a pause as the Underground Hero responded. "Eraserhead, Recovery Girl, and Toshinori are with me." She listened for a moment longer then put the call on speaker phone.

Mockingjay's voice came through the phone. *"Bee's blocking any cameras and listening devices. We need to act fast. I'm at the site Hawks was held at. Bee checked the footage before he gathered it so the Commission can't 'accidentally leak' it onto the internet. Some of it was already gone— he's trying to retrieve it— but we have enough to know the League members Twice and Dabi— along with an unknown— rescued Hawks and Tokoyami. The Commission probably knows as well."*

Miruko's red eyes widened at the implications. "Shit."

"What about Kaetsu?" Toshinori asked rapidly.

"*He's dead."*

Toshinori flinched.

Aizawa's stomach dropped. "Did Hawks—?"

"*No."*

Aizawa decided it was not the time to ask.

"Hawks was assisted by two members of the League." Mockingjay repeated. *"We need to say something **now** before the Commission does and labels Hawks and Tokoyami as Villains."*

Miruko lowered her head so her hair fell into her face. Her eyes were shadowed. "I have an idea. Leave it to me." She hung up and looked to the UA teachers. "Protect Hawks."

She ran out without another word.

XXXXXXX

Mockingjay stared at her phone, watching it return to the home screen as the call disconnected, and shoved it into her pocket. She kept walking through the maze of the asylum's halls, searching for anything else that may be used as evidence that needed to be grabbed before the Commission could destroy it. Hopefully they would be distracted and give her a few more hours.

You'd better know what you're doing, Rumi.

She put a hand to the communicator in her ear. "What else do you have for me, Bee?"

"*I've retrieved some of the footage someone tried to erase but there is nothing I want to show you."* the tired voice of her hacking-inclined ally said through the earpiece.

Mockingjay's lips pressed together. "I know Kaetsu hurt Hawks. I'm prepared for it. I won't go and burn the Commission down even though they fully deserve it."

"*It's not that I'm worried about."* Beetee denied, voice curt.

Mockingjay heard the tapping of fingers on a computer keyboard. As it went on, her impatience got the best of her. "Well?"

"*I'll send it to your phone in a moment."* Beetee said. *"I just need you to promise me you won't run off and get yourself killed. Wait, listen, and **think**."*

"Who do you think I am?" Mockingjay sighed.

"*The woman who shot two people for hurting their loved ones."* Beetee said flatly. *"Three now."*

Despite his words, he showed her the footage.

It appeared on Mockingjay's phone, small and slightly grainy, and her lips thinned as she watched Hawks's desperate struggle to simply walk towards a door, clutching at his bleeding abdomen as he made step after agonizingly slow step. She could not repress a flinch as Hawks's lips moved in undeniable encouragement to force himself to keep walking. Beetee said nothing in her ear but she heard him holding his breath as Hawks tried to make his way outside, only to collapse.

It was then that a new figure appeared.

Mockingjay watched calmly as what appeared to be Ennea helped Hawks, crouching next to him. She sighed. "Bee, I don't see what's so strange about—"

The mask vanished, revealing a Nomu's face.

Seconds later, that face changed.

Tan skin.

Golden hair.

Bright green eyes.

She recognized that face.

Katniss's bow fell from her numb fingers and clattered to the dusty floor.

Beetee was talking, but his voice was distant, like he was speaking in the middle of a raging ocean.

"When Dabi was saved from one of Kaetsu's illusions, this person— apparently called 'Retiarius' but briefly taking the name 'Ennea' after that Vigilante— appeared to use a Quirk that allowed them to burst the pipes in the walls— seemingly by manipulating the water inside. I…I've looked into a few things and Heroes' bodies have gone missing from all over the world. Even if they did not 'go missing', apparently the Capitol wasn't content to let their dead Heroes be cremated. There's a whole market."

He continued to speak, but Katniss could not hear him. His voice was lost in the constant roar of the ocean, loud and fierce like an undercurrent that swept her away and slowly drowned her.

"*My Quirk is Hydrokinesis."*

Green eyes.

"*—not leaving you, Katniss. We're going to get out of here. Together."*

Golden hair.

"*Form a team with me after graduation. Once we're big, maybe we'll go to Japan and thank All Might."*

Tan skin.

"*Do you really think we can do this, Katniss? That we can expose the Capitol Hero Committee for what it really is? I can't believe how deeply their corruption goes. They've ruined so many lives, not just mine, all while pretending to be the backbone of our Hero Society…"*

"*I know what you said, Kat, but I'm not sure we should do this. This could break the system beyond repair and cause* ***everything*** *to collapse. My life is not worth the suffering of all those other people…"*

"*You're right, Katniss. The Capitol needs to go down and I'm our best shot at doing it. This has gone on long enough. I'm ready to come forward."*

Tan skin covered in blood as she watched helplessly through glass—

"*Poseidon to Phoenix! It's a trap! We have to get out. Phoenix, can you hear me? I need backup. Where are you? Katniss? KATNISS!"*

"*Katniss?"*

Katniss blinked. Her eyelashes and cheeks were dry. Her throat burned. Her knees ached from where they had struck the cold stone floor. She lifted a quivering hand and picked up her phone again.

Beetee went silent but she could see he was still on the line. She could not bring herself to speak, and after a pause she heard him begin to mutter again.

"*I'm not saying it's him."* he claimed. *"It's possible that it may be a copy of the Quirk and appearance and nothing else."*

They both knew he did not really believe that.

Unbidden, Hawks's warning forced themselves into her mind.

"*I know this is morbid to ask, but when I die could you make sure my body is cremated? I want to make sure the Commission and League won't be able to do anything with it. In the League's case that's how they create Nomu."*

Katniss forced her voice to work. "It's him. It's *Finnick*."

"*Katniss..."* Beetee paused, considering his next words carefully. *"We cannot act rashly and make assumptions. I can check to see if… if Finnick's body is in his grave—"*

"No." Katniss said instantly. "I need to see for myself."

"That would require you to return to— the United States." She knew he almost said 'home', only to correct himself at the last second.

Katniss could not identify the emotion that churned her stomach but it was not a pleasant one. "I know."

Beetee was not convinced. *"What if it's a trick to get you to leave Japan?"*

"Then they'll regret it." Mockingjay said coldly.

She watched the video again and saw that even as its skull turned as ashen as stone, the Nomu kept those green eyes.

"I need to go." she murmured and hung up on Beetee.

She carefully placed her phone and communicator in the pouches in her pockets.

She grabbed her bow from the ground and stood.

Then she raided each of the rooms for all the flammable chemicals she could find.

Two hours later, the Shiho Asylum had completely burned to the ground, leaving only ashes.

XXXXXXX

It was almost funny how the context could make a gaggle of reporters feel like a mob.

Cameras flashed.

Reporters crowded.

Microphones were shoved in her face, barely missing her as she made her way up to the podium at the end of the crowded hall at her Agency. She had called the press conference two hours ago and it felt like every reporter and journalist in Japan had shown up, filling the room to the brim.

"Miruko! Can you give us any updates about Hawks's condition?"

"Is it true that the League of Villains was involved in Hawks's capture?"

"Can you confirm any of the rumors about Vigilante involvement?"

"Has Hawks truly lost his Quirk?"

"Is the Creature Rejection Clan involved?"

"What are your thoughts on the illegal rescue operation?"

"When can Fumikage Tokoyami make a statement?"

"Miruko, the public demands to know: is Hawks dead?"

Miruko hated talking to the press. Sure, she loved to tell people how much she kicked ass, but it was the other type of meeting she despised. The ones where she had to play the publicity game to avoid a PR nightmare. Her every word would be obsessively scrutinized. Her every expression would be picked apart by behavioral analysts. Her arguments would be plastered across screens all around the country and any slip up or badly phrased sentence would be used against her to tear everything else apart.

Miruko kinda hated people in general sometimes. They loved their stories and drama. They ate up tales of falls from grace with glee, soaring high in the thrill of it all as they failed to see

the hurt fading below them. She did not say any of this. She couldn't even on the best of days because people liked the status quo. As long as it was not them who was targeted, who cared?

Miruko always knew that, but Ricochet had hammered that point home into her head. Because of how Hero Society ran, good publicity was everything. And sometimes, to get that good publicity, other people had to be thrown under the bus. Or someone could throw themselves.

"Hawks is not dead." Miruko began with the easiest question. "Fumikage Tokoyami is still unconscious but the doctors say he is in no danger. Hawks has certainly not lost his Quirk. A majority of his wings had been removed by his captor but they will regenerate." She had to resist the urge to throw the podium at the reporters when they chattered like happy geese, like Hawks being *maimed* was not that big of a deal since he would heal eventually. "As far as we can tell, the criminal responsible for Hawks and Tokoyami's kidnapping is not involved with the CRC or League of Villains. He appears to be working alone. We will learn more once Tokoyami and Hawks wake."

Her answers brought on a new onslaught of questions. She listened to each one carefully, waiting impatiently for what she needed. The Commission was predictable. They would already be trying to cause a stir.

"Miruko! Is it true that Hawks was dropped off at the hospital by Villains?"

There you are.

Miruko looked at the Commission reporter and memorized her face, name, and what station she was from. She allowed herself to glower.

"No." Miruko stated. "He and Tokoyami were rescued and delivered at Mustafu Hospital by Ennea, a Vigilante who has a habit of rescuing kidnapped people." And abuse victims but she was not going to say that yet.

"So you approve of the illegal rescue operation?" the same reporter demanded. "You were investigating yourself with a team a Heroes. Surely you would have—"

"We were bogged down by warrants and procedure. If not for that Vigilante, my brother would be *dead*." Miruko drew herself up and let her lip curl in blatant contempt. "This Vigilante should be applauded, not arrested. If you want to condemn someone who used their Quirk to *save a life*, then I think its the *law* that is the problem."

She stormed off the stage, ignoring the uproar of questions and camera flashes behind her.

When she entered her new apartment in Mustafu a few minutes later, Ricochet was waiting for her with a beer in hand.

The television was on with the news playing, its latest story planted across the bottom of the screen in huge letters.

'*THE VIGILANTE DEBATE: MIRUKO'S CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT SPARKS OUTRAGE.*'

Underneath the title was a question in small print that she did not bother to read. Her blood pressure was already through the roof and as she listened, it only made her hate the world a little more. The anchor and a guest were prattling on about laws and why they were in place, and how Vigilantism should never be applauded under any circumstances since it made a bad precedent, and how Quirks being regulated was necessary for continuous peace and societal growth.

Hawks was hardly mentioned and if he was, it was just as an afterthought.

He was already forgotten in favor of the latest juicy drama.

Just like Miruko wanted. At least… like she *needed*.

She turned it off and turned to Ricochet, reaching for the drink. He held it out of her reach.

"Call me a hypocrite but this is not for you." he drawled.

"Hmph." Miruko growled. She knew he was right. She quickly made a sandwich, eating it quicker than what was probably healthy so she could return to the hospital.

"How's my rankings?" she asked sarcastically.

"It's only been a few minutes so there's no change yet." He scrolled through the rapidly increasing number of comments on an article. "Some people agree with you. Others… don't."

Miruko expected as much. "Do I get a carrot cake for every time someone calls me 'crazy rabbit bitch'?"

"No. You'd gain weight faster than a farm pig at a buffet table."

She snorted and went to the fridge, grabbing a water and chugging half of it down. "So how was I? Genuine enough for you?"

Ricochet did not look proud. He just looked sad, and she knew he hated this as much as her. "You were genuine all right. The MLA might actually believe you."

"Just like the Commission wants." Miruko muttered under her breath.

She grabbed her coat in preparation to leave and go back to the hospital and paused before reaching the door.

I used Hawks's suffering and injuries to start my mission.

Miruko set her coat back down, walked into the bathroom, and vomited.

XXXXXXX

Fumikage Tokoyami opened his eyes to the white of his cell. His breath caught in his throat and he sat upright, instinctively summoning Dark Shadow onto his body like armor—

Before he could do anything else, a warm hand clasped his and he startled, looking from it up to his mother's tear-stained face. Behind her was his father, who looked similarly disheveled, and behind them was Ai, Hikaru, and Detective Tsukauchi, who lingered near the door. He opened his beak, closed it, and looked back at his mother. At least, it appeared to be them.

But what if it wasn't? What if it was another trick of Kaetsu's?

"Are you real?" he blurted.

His mother burst into tears. Her warm arms wrapped around him and she hugged him gently, rocking him and sobbing enough that he could feel the wetness through his hospital gown. He was in a hospital?

"Yes, yes. We're real Fumi. We're real and you're safe."

The veneer of confusion cloaking Tokoyami crumbled away and he clung to her. Her skin was warm and her body was solid and she smelled like peppermint like she always did and she was there and real and this was real and it was *all* real.

Tokoyami hid his face in his mother's shoulder and cried. Dark Shadow wept with him, still clinging to his body in more of a hug than as armor even as tears trailed down their faces. His mother cried with him, more relieved than he, because above all else, Tokoyami was *exhausted*. The memories were coming back, pushing into his mind until it felt like he was breaking, and he could not stop the tears.

I was kidnapped. I almost died. Hawks almost died. ***I killed someon*** *e.*

He barely noticed as his mother ran her fingers through his feathers in a soothing motion, or as his father rubbed circles on his back. But they were real and there and he was out.

He was out.

Was Hawks?

Tokoyami's breath caught in his throat and he looked to Tsukauchi.

"Is Hawks alive?"

The detective's nod was enough to send Tokoyami into another embarrassing round of sobs, this time relieved. Eventually he pulled away and wiped hastily at his eyes. His mother clung to his hand, while his father stayed at her shoulder, eyes wet.

After giving them a moment to compose themselves, Tsukauchi stepped forward and took an empty chair by the bed.

"I know you just woke up but I need to ask you some important questions."

Tokoyami's father and mother glared but Tokoyami himself nodded hesitantly and looked down at his hands. He knew he had important information they would need for the case. Kaetsu could still be out there. At least his Nomu should be gone though—

Tokoyami's fingers twitched and he looked to Tsukauchi, panic clawing at his throat.

"Do my parents need to be here? I don't—" He clamped his beak shut before he could say 'I don't want them to know what happened.'

His mother's horrified expression almost made him change his mind but she pulled herself together and smiled bravely, squeezing his hand. "We'll be right outside if you need us."

She released his hand and stepped out with his father, Ai, and Hikaru. He heard their worried whispers before the door shut and his stomach twisted guiltily. He was delaying the inevitable. They would find out what happened eventually. Dark Shadow gave a low, concerned whine and he straightened his back, meeting Tsukauchi's eyes as steadily as he could.

The detective took out a recording device, pen, and paper, settling back in his chair. He seemed completely unperturbed by all the crying but Tokoyami supposed he would be used to it. Would Tokoyami himself be like that someday?

I won't get the chance.

Tokoyami lowered his gaze.

Tsukauchi did not react to what had to be an obvious sign of guilt. "Let's start with the basics, shall we."

He had Tokoyami confirm his name, birthdate, Quirk, and other personal details. Then he asked about the day he was kidnapped, which he must already know the details of due to Ai's report. Tokoyami answered his questions anyway. He told Tsukauchi about the strange boy outside and his capture, keeping to short, toneless sentences as he prepared himself for what Ai hadn't been able to tell the detective: what happened after.

He told Tsukauchi about waking up in a white room. He told him about Kaetsu coming in with the Nomu that looked like Jiro— and was reassured it wasn't her, to his near tear-inducing relief— and being told he was going to be there a while along with Hawks. He told him about his sleeping quarters and Dark Shadow's growing weakness. He told him about days passing and not knowing how long it had been. When Tsukauchi told him the date, Tokoyami's stupid sensitive urge to cry came back.

"Did I miss the extra training?" he asked. It wasn't that important in the grand scale of things. Especially since he probably was going to be expelled from UA.

Dark Shadow started crying again.

Tsukauchi shook his head. "The intended training event was delayed after your kidnapping. Now that you're back, UA may reschedule or plan something else."

Tokoyami did not know what to feel about that so he did not say anything.

"What events led to your escape?" Tsukauchi asked next.

It was the question Tokoyami had been dreading. He may not be able to become a Hero anymore, but he could still be heroic and tell the truth.

"One day, I heard Hawks screaming." he said. His voice was flat. Toneless. Not like he was stoic, but empty. He tried not to think about it. "He was— It sounded like he was being tortured. For hours. I… I covered my ears. The screaming eventually stopped. Then the Nomu came in and she— it had blood all over its mouth. I… I thought it had killed Hawks. Then it just left." Tokoyami swallowed the lump in his throat. "The Nomu and Kaetsu came back some time later and he left me with h— it. I heard him order it to kill me over the speakers. So I ran. Eventually I got the idea to break lights as I went so Dark Shadow could gain some strength. The Nomu—"

His shoulders lurched as his breath hitched. "The Nomu cornered me. I was going to die. So I let Dark Shadow break all the lights and go berserk. The Nomu began to use the light attack it used to hurt Dark Shadow last time. Dark Shadow grabbed its mouth and forced it shut and — and—"

Tsukauchi was looking at him.

Neutrally.

Silently.

Not showing any of the thoughts he must be having on his face.

"Its head exploded." Tokoyami admitted tremulously. "It didn't regenerate. I *killed* the Nomu chasing me."

Tsukauchi's expression did not contort in anger or disgust like he expected. He did not rise and declare Tokoyami was under arrest for murder or manslaughter. Instead a sorrowful, understanding look crossed his face.

"It's not your fault." Tokoyami opened his mouth but Tsukauchi kept talking. "Kaetsu's Quirk let him bring people's fears to life. The Nomu chasing you was an illusion, nothing more. It had no will of its own, and it was *never* alive. You're not in any trouble for defending yourself with your Quirk."

Illegally using his Quirk was the last thing on Tokoyami's list of concerns. Tokoyami remembered the Nomu's head exploding. He remembered blood on himself and Dark Shadow, blood that did not fade. He checked to make sure it was not still there, somehow transferring to his hospital scrubs. It wasn't.

"I… see." Tokoyami told the detective, if only because he knew Tsukauchi expected a response.

There was an uncomfortable pause. Tokoyami waited for Tsukauchi to change his mind and tell him what a monster he was. He didn't.

"What happened next?" Tsukauchi prodded.

Tokoyami might have feared this part as much as the previous one. He forced himself to answer. "Twice and Dabi showed up. Dabi used his flames to calm Dark Shadow down. They said they were there for Hawks. I told them I thought Hawks was dead but Twice said his friend had Hawks already. He sounded… genuinely pleasant and enthusiastic. But it was *unnerving* considering he was a Villain. I thought he was acting nice but was actually threatening Hawks to keep me in line so I went with them."

He took another shuddering breath. "We were trying to find their 'friend' when they crashed through the wall carrying Hawks. Hawks was u-unconscious and he— he'd been stabbed." Tokoyami tried not to remember the sight of Hawks's bloody body and swallowed a retch. "He was— There was a lot of bl—" He retched but cleared his throat, changing the subject. "The friend called themself 'Ennea' and Twice and Dabi referred to them as a Vigilante."

Tsukauchi's expression had not changed but Tokoyami could see him writing quickly. Had he heard of Ennea before? Did he know Ennea was a Nomu? Fumikage reminded himself that he was not absolutely certain Ennea— or what else had they called themself? 'Retiarius?' Whatever their name was, he was not *completely sure* they was a Nomu. He was *not*, because how could a Nomu be a Vigilante?

Why am I so reluctant to tell him?

Thinking back to Tsukauchi's response to the other Nomu's death, Tokoyami knew the answer.

Would he consider Ennea— or is it 'Retiarius'— alive either?

He waited for Tsukauchi to speak and reluctantly realized the detective was waiting for him to continue.

"They begged Twice to help Hawks." he said. "Twice came up with the idea to use a clone to give Hawks a blood transfusion. I… I let him."

It felt like another admission of guilt. Tsukauchi did not say anything or accuse him of letting a Villain gain access to a Hero's clones. Tokoyami wished he could trust this man but Purple said not to trust *anyone* except UA. With that in mind, he chose his next words carefully.

"The clone attacked them immediately. He only stopped when he was told they wanted to save Hawks's life. They used his blood to help Hawks and the clone melted away."

"So Twice can clone Hawks now." Tsukauchi murmured.

"He said that he can't change the clone's morals." Tokoyami explained quickly. "And they don't get memories past the point of where Twice last saw the original. So he can't use them to get information or anything."

Tsukauchi lowered his pen and pinned Tokoyami with a surprisingly empathetic stare. "You don't need to explain yourself. I assure you, you won't get in trouble for saving a life." He inclined his head. "Did they say anything about capturing Hawks or you for the League?"

Tokoyami shook his head firmly. "They never said anything about capturing us for themselves. Not even Dabi. In fact Dabi seemed…" he hesitated. "…upset. Hawks woke up for a bit but he was out of it. He kept calling Dabi 'Touya'. It… seemed to shake him." It was the same name as the illusion boy that Kaetsu used to capture Tokoyami but he was not sure he should mention that.

Tsukauchi's eyes had narrowed in thought. "I'll look into it. And then?"

"They tried to figure out what to do with us." Tokoyami said. "Hawks needed a doctor but they knew they couldn't just deposit us outside of a hospital. They called another League member they called Spinner— I think he was a Stain supporter— and he picked us up. Ennea offered to take us the last bit of the way."

Tsukauchi did not react. Tokoyami desperately wished he would so he knew what the detective was thinking. "So they just let you go?"

"Yes. Spinner drove us a few miles from the hospital and they left us. They were really worried we'd be seen as Villains just because they helped us." Tokoyami met Tsukauchi's gaze steadily. "Will we?"

"No." Tsukauchi stated.

A few weeks ago Tokoyami might have believed him. Now, he had an inkling how Hero Society and the Commission really viewed the world. "They'll try it though."

"We won't let them." Tsukauchi stated.

Tokoyami wondered if that was true. Tsukauchi was said to work with All Might, but didn't he and all the police work for the Commission too?

"*Don't let them take me."*

Hawks's desperate plea rang in his mind and Tokoyami's shoulders tensed. Hawks was here, at this hospital, but was he safe at all? Hadn't Purple said not to trust anyone but UA?

Tokoyami tried to get out of bed. Tsukauchi stopped him.

"You shouldn't get up—"

"Where's Hawks?" Tokoyami asked, forcing his voice not to shake.

"He's in the critical ward." Tsukauchi reassured him.

"*Is* he?" Tokoyami demanded, harsher than he meant. He flinched and ducked his head. "I'm sorry sir. I— I just need to stay with him."

It was a ridiculous request coming from a Hero student and Tokoyami knew it. But what else was he supposed to do? Tell this detective he knew the Commission was corrupt and share that he feared Hawks may be killed here?

Tsukauchi did not shake his head but he did give Tokoyami an unreadable stare. "You need to rest. Hawks has a guard of three Heroes at all times. He will be fine."

The 'I doubt a first-year student would make much of a difference.' was implied but unsaid.

Tokoyami tried not to feel hurt or angry as he nodded in apparent agreement, submitting to the adults' will.

As he laid back in his bed with Dark Shadow clinging to him and his parents and Hero guards rushed back in, he felt strangely alone.

XXXXXXX

Hawks drifted in and out of consciousness.

He remembered hearing voices, and a dull, constant pain that was sometimes sharp, and blinding, endless whiteness, but everything faded away too quickly for him to figure out what was going on. He drifted— in a body-lacking experience way more than a dissociating way — floating along in darkness as he slowly crept back to consciousness.

Sometimes Miruko was there.

Sometimes Recovery Girl.

Once, he thought he saw All Might.

But everything would fade away, and he'd float in nothing, almost like he didn't exist.

Until one time Hawks opened his eyes and realized his world was solid.

He immediately shut them again. The lights above him were wrong. He was not in the white room that had been his cell. Was he in a different location then? Had the Commission grabbed him? His memories were fuzzy, but he thought he remembered Kaetsu mentioning his owners. He had to be careful. There was something in his arm. He would not put it past Kaetsu or the Commission to put something nasty on him that would activate if he moved wrong.

Hawks stayed still and listened to the steady beeping by his head. Okay, so they were tracking his heartbeat. He had to try to *stay calm*.

First, get what he could from his surroundings without alerting anyone who might be in the room with him. It was too risky to use feathers—

My wings are gone.

Stay. Calm .

Hawks breathed in the scent of antiseptic and felt slightly rough fabric beneath his fingers. The sheets were soft compared to the blood-crusted ones he'd had in that room.

Stay. Calm.

Hawks heard a soft creak to his left. He carefully opened his eyes a sliver and saw Miruko sitting in a chair by his bed with Aizawa seated beside her. Or what appeared to be them. Kaetsu could create Nomu. Why not other people? Their heads were close together and they were speaking lowly.

"—safe to move him soon." maybe-Aizawa was saying. "Nedzu and Recovery Girl want him on the UA campus as soon as possible."

Were they talking about him?

Yes, they were talking about him.

Who *else* would they be talking about, *idiot*?

Hawks kept his breathing steady as he continued to listen.

"He won't like that." Miruko commented.

"He doesn't have a choice."

Hawks wondered if Aizawa would say that to his face. The part of him that instinctively rankled at the thought of another— albeit nicer— cage hissed quietly but it was instantly smothered by the exhausted realization that Aizawa was merely saying the facts. Hawks was expected to work for UA. He would have to sit within its campus to prevent the Commission from whisking him away. That was his future.

But what if I don't ***want*** *to go to UA?*

It was a stupid thought. Why did he bother to have it? He did not have a choice in the matter. UA was bending over backwards to accommodate for him but he was being his stupid, selfish self and whining about the lost freedom he never had.

Wait, did UA not know about his wings somehow? Didn't they see he was useless as a Hero without them? Why did they still want him?

Hawks realized he would be going to a school filled with people who trained, prioritized, and judged based on Quirks. Worse, he would be teaching those kids… while *his* Quirk was practically gone. He forced himself to keep a calm exterior.

Some of them will make comments about you. You're used to it. Accept it.

None of the expected protests came from within his mind.

Hawks could not stop his heartbeat from quickening. He felt for the voices, only to meet a smooth but solid wall. He caught not a glimpse of their thoughts, emotions or presences.

It was like they were not there at all.

Guys?

Guys, are you there?

Green?

Red?

Orange?

Pink?

Purple?

Yellow?

Silver?

White?

*…**Anyone**?*

Silence met his plea.

Hawks took a breath and tried to *stay calm*. He realized the voices outside his head had gone quiet. Did they know he was awake? He reluctantly opened his eyes to meet Miruko's sharp red gaze. Behind her, Aizawa and Recovery Girl were watching him… warily?

Did they see him as a threat?

Smile.

Now .

Hawks smiled. "Hey." Memories trickled back and his smile vanished as the beeping by his head increased in tempo. "Tokoyami?"

"He's okay." Miruko reassured him. "He had to get some stitches and an IV but he's been released."

Hawks's brow crinkled. "How long…?"

"You've been unconscious for nine days." Recovery Girl stated.

"How much did you hear?" Aizawa interrupted.

Recovery Girl gave him a *look*.

"...We'll talk about that later." Aizawa acknowledged begrudgingly. "We have a handy little device so you can talk freely." It took Hawks a minute to realize he was talking about Red's bug-blocking device. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"Being stabbed." Hawks croaked.

His breath hitched and he reached for his shirt to see what was under it. Miruko grasped his hand and guided it away, holding it in both of hers. Her hands were nice and warm. Hawks frowned at them, noticing her nails were jagged on the ends. Had she been biting them?

Hawks waited in the silence for a while before realizing they were waiting for him again. He slowly processed that, then took some more time to think of questions. His head felt drifty and cluttered, like someone had stuffed soggy cotton into it. He tried to focus.

"What happened? How did I get here? Was I rescued?"

"We do not know all the details—" Lie. Why was she lying to him? Was something wrong? "—but you and Tokoyami were dropped off by the Vigilante called 'Ennea'."

Hawks remembered a hooded, stone-pale face and repressed a shiver. Did they know Ennea was a Nomu? More memories rushed back and he turned his head away from Miruko, breathing sharply. She held his hand and he did not pull away no matter how much he wanted to because Miruko shouldn't be touching a *murderer*.

Did they know he had killed Kaetsu? They must not since there weren't police or Heroes stationed at the door. Or did Aizawa and Miruko count? That didn't make sense. It would be a conflict of interest.

They must not know.

Hawks opened his mouth to confess only for Recovery Girl to start speaking.

"I cannot answer everything that happened but I can tell you your injuries. Would you like to know?"

Hawks nodded immediately because he needed to keep track of how long he would be out of work—

My ***wings—***

"When you were brought in you had thirty-nine stab wounds in your abdominal and chest area, two lacerations on your right cheek, another on your chin, forty-five shallow lacerations on your thighs, back, and legs, a puncture wound from repeated use of a needle, a broken ankle, three cracked ribs and a cracked ulna, a dislocated shoulder, bruising— mostly around your neck— a damaged windpipe, were malnourished and dehydrated, and…" She adjusted her clipboard busily. "...your blood tests revealed a heightened amount of estrogen— mostly estradiol— and a compound we have been unable to identify in your bloodstream."

Hawks's mind registered her words and promptly ignored them for the sake of his already tremulous grip on control.

"Then there's the amputation of your wings." Recovery Girl finished gently.

Hawks smiled. It felt frozen on his face.

"Before you ask, we had to destroy the feathers you left in the alley." Miruko interjected. Her tone was as blunt as usual but there was a strange strained undertone to it, as if she were choking on something. "We didn't want the Commission to have them."

Hawks kept smiling like his face had been turned to stone.

"It's fine. I didn't need those feathers." he said airily. "I know my wings will grow back eventually because the Commission cut part of them off before to test if they would. So I'll just be grounded for a little while. No big deal. I'm very lucky that they'll regenerate."

The way Recovery Girl looked at him made him uncomfortable. He hoped he wasn't showing any signs of weakness. Hawks forced his gaze to the window, taking in the nice, sunny day outside. His heart beat a panicked tempo and he could not identify why until he remembered her earlier words.

"I've been unconscious *how* long?"

"Nine days." Recovery Girl repeated. "You were kidnapped nearly a month ago. It's August."

And because Hawks's priorities were always skewed towards the mission, he realized the significance of that.

"The camp was supposed to start days ago." he blurted, looking frantically at Aizawa. "Did I miss..." He remembered their unaware company just in time. "...my first day of work?"

Miruko sighed. "Of course you're worried about that."

Hawks tried not to wilt.

Aizawa raised an eyebrow at him but understand his real worries. "After Tokoyami's kidnapping, the training camp plan was changed a bit. It's still happening though."

"Oh." Hawks whispered faintly. "Sounds good."

The training camp incident alerted UA to the traitor's presence. Without that proof and even with Aizawa's knowledge, who knew what might happen if there was no investigation? Unless the League showed up again…

Would they show up? At least, would Twice and Dabi?

Wait. Why would Twice and Dabi—?

Memories clicked into place. They were strange and kind of foggy, as if they were from someone else's dream, but he saw Twice and Dabi helping… *him*? He was on the floor but he saw them help from… beside himself? What the heck? Did he have a weird out-of-body experience or something?

They saved me.

Hawks fiddled with his sheet and took glances at Aizawa in his peripheral. "Did Tokoyami tell you how we were saved? I only remember… bits and pieces."

"You were rescued by Dabi, Twice, Spinner, and the Vigilante called Ennea." Aizawa said bluntly. "Spinner drove you and Ennea dropped you off here on their own, but Tokoyami told us what happened in between."

Recovery Girl jabbed him with her cane and Miruko glared. They both looked back to Hawks, searching his expression, and he realized they were expecting him to freak out. He *should* freak out. Three Villains had saved him. That would not look good when the Commission found out.

Except… Twice and Dabi— and apparently Spinner— had *saved* him and Tokoyami. They had done so without taking them to a Nomu lab unless all of this was some elaborate illusion. They genuinely *saved them* and asked for nothing in return.

Hawks felt his expression soften. "I should thank them." He realized what he'd said— and to who— and froze. The heart monitor beeped frantically. "I— I didn't mean that. I…" He trailed off and avoided looking at them. "I meant it. I'm sorry."

"You don't have to feel bad." Miruko said fiercely, because of course she did. "They went out of their way to rescue you."

Why though? What was different enough that three Villains would help a Hero they should despise? Twice he maybe understood because Twice was a kind man and Spinner was a Stain supporter, but Dabi? The one who burned people to a crisp for being a waste of time—

But ***has*** *he yet?*

Stop trying to make excuses for Villains, Hawks.

Were they excuses though? In a way, but not nearly as bad as the Commission said. These Villains were not as irredeemable as the Commission said.

Screw what the Commission says.

Hawks jumped, holding his breath as he waited to feel Orange's presence. There was nothing except his own thoughts and feelings.

This was all *him*?

It… didn't feel as awful as he thought it would.

Or maybe he was just numb by now.

"They're not in trouble, right?" Hawks asked.

"Ennea's wanted for vigilantism." Miruko said bluntly. "Dabi, Spinner, and Twice's involvement is hush-hush."

Why? To protect Hawks and Tokoyami or because the Commission didn't want Villains to be known for rescuing a well-liked Hero? That would conflict with the narrative that all Vilains were baby-eating monsters, after all. Hawks shoved his thoughts about that aside and focused on Ennea. The other Ennea, who was a Nomu. They identified as a Vigilante, huh? Well, it wasn't like they could be an official licensed Hero. None of his rescuers could be Heroes, because of circumstance, choice, or plain bad luck. However, they had chosen to be heroes anyway, the kind who chose to help when others didn't.

Yet if it was revealed, they would be prosecuted and considered even worse Villain scum because they acted outside of the law.

That didn't sit well with Hawks.

Hawks kept his gaze down on the plain white blankets covering his legs.

"Things need to change." Hawks whispered. He did not look up at the three Pro Heroes next to him. "The Comm— the Commission i-is wrong. About… certain Villain things."

His voice came out breathy and weak. He wouldn't be able to convince anyone with that kind of meek attitude. But he could barely voice his thoughts, let alone convince others of them. Hawks risked a glance at the other two Pro Heroes and saw them both scrutinizing him. He dropped his gaze and forced his wings to be—

I don't have wings right now.

A sound tried to force itself out of his throat but he swallowed it, pressing his lips together. He didn't want them to pass off his words as some emotional knee-jerk reaction to everything that had happened. He meant it when he said what he did. But he was Hawks, the blinded, brainwashed Commission-bitch who naively thought Villains weren't that bad and was too stupid to see how the world really worked for over fifteen years—

"I agree with you." Miruko said calmly.

"As do I." Aizawa stated.

"And I." Recovery Girl added.

Hawks blinked owlishly at them. He heard the beeping of the heart monitor and only then realized how quick its tempo had become. His hands were shaking and he watched theirs, waiting for them to laugh and mock him for thinking they were serious.

None of them laughed.

"We can talk about revolution later." Aizawa said and Hawks realized he was *completely serious*. "You need to worry about yourself right now."

There was something odd in his tone which caused Hawks to read between the lines. "You're worried I'm going to die unexpectedly from 'complications'."

Aizawa did not confirm it. He did not have to.

Hawks's pale lips stretched into a tired smile. "I thought as much." His smile quivered and faded. "Did they find Kaetsu?"

Miruko's pleasant aura vanished. Anger wafted off her in near-physical waves and Hawks heard the bones in her knuckles crack as she clenched her hands into fists. Hawks went still, arm twitching before he forced it to remain down and not in front of his face. Miruko did not appear to notice but Aizawa certainly did if his frown was any indication.

"You don't have to worry, Hawks." Miruko said coldly. "Kaetsu is dead. He got a terminal case of 'arrow to the face'. *She's* out compiling evidence, by the way."

Hawks stared at her uncomprehendingly and slowly pieced together that she was talking about Katniss. The rest of the puzzle was easy to finish after that. Miruko looked back at him, unblinking, even as Aizawa shot her a sharp look. He searched her countenance for any sign of regret or discomfort and found none. She knew what Mockingjay did but she did not care.

Hawks tried not to blame himself. Logically, he knew he should not feel guilty.

But Mockingjay had *killed someone for him*.

But hadn't Hawks killed him first?

Wait, were they protecting him by having Mockingjay take the blame?

Hawks couldn't let them do that. He swallowed. "I… shoved him. Into some metal. It p-pierced his head."

"That wasn't real." Miruko stated, sounding completely sure of herself. "Mockingjay says he did not have a mark on him when she found him."

Hawks remembered the wet sound of Kaetsu's skull striking the metal. He swallowed a gag. Could that fight truly be another creation of Kaetsu's Quirk? Was it from Hawks's fear of Kaetsu or maybe a fear of killing someone? If that was true, then *what else* wasn't real? Was his memory unreliable? If his memory was unreliable, how could they trust anything he said?

Hawks did not feel particularly distressed about these questions at the moment.

He just felt tired.

Very, very tired.

And alone.

His head was too quiet.

Answer.

Please answer.

I need to know Kaetsu didn't kill you.

Please…

"*Gold."*

Hawks took a shuddering breath that outsiders may think was a repressed sob. He ducked his head, not caring if he drifted as he turned inward. He did his best impression of a hug as he could without literally going into his head, opening the floodgates and letting them feel all the joy, relief, and concern for them he felt. Flickers of happiness and content brushed his consciousness and he recognized each of their distinct presences.

Hawks relaxed. *I'm so glad you're okay. When Kaetsu… banished you I thought—*

"We're not going to die like that, idiot." Orange interrupted gruffly.

"*We were blocked for a bit but we're completely fine now."* Green reassured him.

*Are you **sure**?* Hawks worried.

"*Yes. Nothing is wrong. We're perfectly okay."*

Green's voice was calm and patient in an oddly familiar and disconcerting way. Hawks's mind tried to connect it to where he had heard that tone before but failed. He resisted the desire to go into their dorm and check on each of them just to be sure. He should have expected Kaetsu to use his fear of losing his friends against them, just like his fear of losing his wings had…

*My **wings** .*

My fault.

For once, Hawks's mind did not splinter. Instead, every part of his thoughts were consumed by the lack of weight on his back. Hawks could not tell if his body flinched but his mind retreated into itself, pulling away from the voices. He didn't cut off access to only his own Quirk because of his actions. The voices had lost theirs too, with the exception of Yellow outside and *maybe* Purple inside Hawks's head.

I'm sorry.

"*You don't need to apologize."* Purple said roughly.

"*We don't blame you."* Pink said at the same time.

"*It's not your damn fault."* Orange snapped gruffly.

"*You didn't do anything wrong."* Yellow added, much more gently.

Hawks desperately hoped his body was not crying. That would be unfortunate. *If I hadn't blocked you in, if I'd fought back, if I hadn't been such a damn* ***coward*** *then Kaetsu wouldn't have been able to— to—*

"*Stop it."* White interrupted and Hawks snapped his jaw shut. *"You are not to blame for this. Kaetsu is the one who hurt you. Kaetsu is the one who captured you. Kaetsu is the one who… who cut off your wings. You did* ***not*** *ask for it, and you did* ***not*** *deserve it."*

"***Any*** *of it."* Red whispered.

"*You acted most heroically when it mattered."* Silver declared firmly. *"You saved us all."*

It certainly did not feel like it. But for their sakes, Hawks closed his eyes and tried to focus on the successes rather than the failures. That's what a Hero did, after all. And he— he might not have his wings right now but he was *still* a Hero.

I'm going to teach your past selves, Hawks told them. He tried to move his wings and felt nothing from the small bones that remained of them. *Think I can be trusted not to mess them up and ruin their futures?*

"*Of course."* Green said as if that were the most obvious truth in the world. *"We're here to save them. Together. You aren't alone."*

Hawks could not decipher the swell of conflicting emotions he felt so he retreated.

His body blinked.

Miruko was in his face, her hand brushing his hair back. She immediately retreated, expression unreadable.

"You drifted for a few hours. Aizawa had to go home. Tsukauchi agreed to come in tomorrow for your statement."

"Sorr...y." Hawks said, slowly enunciating the word. His spine went rigid and he forced a smile. "I mean, thank you for waiting. As always. Have I ever told you that you're amazing?"

"Maybe once or twice." Miruko drawled. She leaned forward and studied his features. He wondered what she saw there that no one else would. "You don't have to smile for me."

Hawks chuckled. "Weird statement for right now but okay."

Miruko looked at him, *hard*, like she was trying to see into his head.

Then she pulled him into her arms.

She was warm, and smelled like cinnamon.

Her arms lay below the mangled remains of his wings.

It had been weeks since Kaetsu cut the rest of his wings off but not a single feather had grown back.

Miruko was trembling. For some reason, *she* was trembling as she hugged him. He was *not* the one trembling because he did not seek comfort. He did the comforting so he had to comfort her because she was trembling, *not* him.

"It's not that bad." he reminded himse— Miruko. "I bet if you lost an arm or something you'd just grin and keep on fighting like Heroes should. I'm so lucky. My wings can grow back. I am very *l-lucky*."

His voice cracked and when he tried to clear his throat, a small sound escaped him. Another whimper followed it and he clapped a hand over his mouth, muffling a third.

What was *wrong* with him? He couldn't be upset. Heroes had to smile even when distressed. Would real Heroes cry if they lost a limb?

*"**Yes**."* Orange stated. *"And honestly? Trying to restrict what Heroes can and can't feel is fucking stupid."*

Hawks considered that.

He blinked.

Once.

Twice.

His chest was starting to ache, as was his throat.

Miruko's arms were below his shoulder blades, not brushing a single feather.

The shirt of his hospital scrubs pressed against his skin in all the wrong places.

His back was too light.

His wings were…

Hawks's smile shrank and vanished.

His throat tightened like someone had put a vice around it.

His vision blurred.

Warm liquid trailed down his cheeks and his thin shoulders trembled.

Miruko held Hawks tightly, refusing to let him go as he sobbed.

Running Out of Time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

THE CAGED BIRD: HAWKS'S YEAR-LONG DISAPPEARANCE FINALLY SOLVED

One year and four months ago, the Winged Hero Hawks vanished while in pursuit of a Villain. After a year of absence, he reappeared, saving Ingenium in Hosu. News of his heroic reemergence spread throughout Japan along with the burning question: Where had Hawks been?

After four months of speculation and silence from both Hawks and the Hero Public Safety Commission, we finally have our answer: Hawks was kidnapped by a stalker.

Hawks has adoring fans of all ages from across all walks of life, but some adoration is less benign than others. In this particular case, investigators theorize a mind control-type Quirk may be involved. Psychological studies have shown a correlation between certain types of Quirks and an increased predisposition towards violence, obsession, and aggression. Adoration becomes a desire to own and control, and when they realize they cannot have the Hero, some Villains lash out.

The Hero Commission has confided in MNN news that this is the case Hawks's kidnappings, both of which were at the hands of the same Villain. That's right: Investigators have confirmed that not only was the Villain responsible for Hawks's latest kidnapping and the attack on him inside his home, he was the one holding our beloved Winged Hero captive all last year.

"Hawks told us of his captivity when he returned." a Hero Public Safety Commission representative told MNN. "Due to the sensitive nature of the case, we opened a quiet investigation but the Villain eluded us."

When questioned for details on Hawks's captivity and how he was captured, the Commission representative declined to comment. "The details of the case must remain confidential until the Villain is arrested and brought to court."

Although the Commission refused to give us details, there are some which we can see for ourselves. Most notably, Hawks's missing wings.

"*The Villain did amputate most of Hawks's wings, yes." the Commission representative admitted. "Rest assured, they will regenerate in due time as they always have. Hawks will be flying again soon."*

Until then, Hawks will trade soaring through the sky for teaching the next generation of Pro Heroes at UA. For those of you who balk at the idea of not seeing Hawks on his

daily patrol, fear not! Sources at UA have confirmed that Hawks will be working full time at the school during his recovery period, but will be reduced to a part-time teaching position once he is healed.

"*We wish Hawks the best at his temporary position and encourage him to enjoy his time off." the Commission representative said. "After what he went through, he deserves the break. That kind of ordeal leaves scars. People see ghosts where there are none. Hopefully his time at UA will help him heal—"*

*"What a load of **bullshit**."* Orange spat. *"What is this crap? They might as well be saying 'We're covering our asses and you're fucking dead once you're out of UA.'"*

Hawks lowered his phone and turned off the screen, hiding the article from sight. *Why are you surprised?*

"*I'm not surprised. I'm **pissed**."*

"*Did you know the sky is blue?"* Yellow asked rhetorically.

"*Technically it is grey right now."* Silver corrected.

Hawks looked out the window of his room at the hospital and saw the sky was indeed grey. He watched the clouds drift along far above, tracing random patterns in them as he ignored the plate of food that lay untouched on the table beside his bed. He knew a nurse would come in soon. She would notice the food and try to encourage him to eat it.

When Miruko or Toshinori or Aizawa showed up— likely with more flowers and gifts from well-wishers that had to go through layers of security before reaching Hawks— they would join in on trying to get Hawks to at least eat a few bites.

Sometimes he would.

Other times, he wouldn't.

It was becoming a familiar pattern but Hawks just didn't really feel like eating. Again.

He didn't have to wonder why.

Hawks's wings still weren't growing back. Recovery Girl had explained malnutrition and trauma— though she did not use that word— could be responsible. She said it was common for people to repress their Quirks due to upheaval and disturbing events in their lives. She reassured him that things would get better. She encouraged him to take care of himself and that all the blame was on Kaetsu.

Despite her obvious efforts, all Hawks heard was 'Your wings aren't growing back because of *you*. You messed up and now you're repressing your own Quirk because you're scared of being hurt again. You're that damn *pathetic*.'

Hawks opened the article and scrolled down to the comments. There were more get-well wishes than he expected, about as many comments about whether he was single that he

expected, and just the amount of people wondering if he was secretly dying as he expected.

Then there were those making caged bird jokes, 'Guess he's the Wing*less* Hero now' jabs, and a couple users saying it must be easier for Hawks to walk around without people noticing since he 'looked normal now' and how much simpler it must be for him to sit in high-backed chairs and sleep 'like normal people'.

Most people would stop then and there but Hawks kept on scrolling because he *loved* punishing himself that much. He soon came across a commentator that said they would have kidnapped Hawks to keep him too. The replies were split between those admonishing the original poster for being insensitive and those agreeing and saying Hawks would look sexy tied up. Hawks immediately shut the article again.

"*Are we sure we want to save the world?"* Yellow asked.

There was a heavy pause.

"*That's a joke by the way."*

"*Don't take it personally, Gold. The internet is just being the internet."* Pink said. There was another, tense pause. *"That goes for you as well, White. You're… smoking."*

"*I know."* White sighed, sounding just a *bit* too calm. *"I'm just disappointed no one has noticed the discrepancies in the Commission's story. They do realize the media will want to interview Hawks about his 'kidnappings'—one of which didn't happen and the other of which was likely done on their orders— correct?"*

"*They're probably counting on those discrepancies."* Purple said darkly. *"If Hawks messes up,* ***he*** *will be seen as the liar."*

Hawks knew he was right. The Commission was not doing anything new. They pretended to support Hawks while planting small seeds to show he was 'traumatized' so his word 'couldn't be trusted' while also leaving it open for Hawks to have 'lied' to them about where he was for a year. Only time would tell if any sprouted. And they very well could considering Hawks himself was doubting his own memory.

Because he just could not get enough when it came to torturing himself, Hawks flipped the screen to Kaetsu's autopsy report. His handler's body had been badly burned in a fire caused by 'faulty wiring' at Shiho Asylum but in a world of Quirks and modern technology, burning a corpse was not the most effective way to hide the real cause of death. Besides, Hawks was sure hiding the evidence had not been Mockingjay's motive. If it was, they never would have found the body.

Hawks had not been told who compiled the report and covered up the death and his questions about the subject were politely ignored. He tried to tell himself it was because he was not part of the investigation team— if one existed— but had the sinking feeling it was because they were trying to shield him since they saw him as 'mentally fragile'. The latter part was less of a feeling and more of a fact since he had seen those exact words on one of his doctor's clipboards.

Hawks had attempted to tell them— the police, the other Heroes, the doctors— about his final encounter with Kaetsu but knew his word had been dismissed as a near-death-experience based hallucination at best. He should have known he would not be believed. He never was, and there was even less evidence than usual to back him up this time. After all, the autopsy clearly stated that Kaetsu's only injury pre-burning was from the 'thin weapon'— the arrow— that killed him.

"We know you're telling the truth."

Hawks tried not to wince at White's gentle and undeserved support. *Maybe you shouldn't. Maybe I hallucinated it all and 'fantasized having a victory over my abuser in order to deal with my trauma'.*

"*That doctor deserves an explosion to his smug, condescending face."* Orange hissed.

"*That or more empathy training.*" Silver added coldly, notably not chastising Orange. *"Although a punch or two may suffice."*

"You should have more faith in yourself, Gold." Purple stated. *"Something is definitely off about the reports on Kaetsu's death. It reeks of a cover up, and* ***not*** *one that is meant to protect us."*

"It ***is*** *concerning that they dismissed your account of the encounter so quickly."* Red murmured.

"Gold definitely didn't hallucinate considering the wounds we were brought in with and the aftereff— um... other factors." Green muttered to himself. *"So why would someone heal Kaetsu and leave him for Mockingjay to kill? To incriminate her? A personal grudge? To make Gold's word seem less reliable…?"*

Hawks shuddered and shut his eyes. *Can we stop talking about this?*

"Okay." Green agreed easily.

Hawks's phone buzzed and he saw it was a message from Mockingjay telling him she was about to get on her plane. Hawks sent an okay back and told her to enjoy her trip even though he suspected she wasn't traveling for fun. Mockingjay had always told him she could not bear to return to America, and yet that was where she was going. He did not know what she had found at the Asylum but something had set her off. He could only pray it was not some type of Commission trap to get her out of the country or make her seem guilty after killing Kaetsu.

While she was gone, Shatterpoint would be in charge of Hawks's Agency in his absence. Hawks had put him in charge over the phone. He had wanted to go there to tell Shatterpoint the news and at least do paperwork only to be unofficially barred from anything to do with Hero work outside of UA while he quote-unquote '*recovered*'. Hawks could only hope that was not a sign of things to come. He would not put it past the Commission to revoke his Hero license if his Quirk did not return quickly enough.

"*We have our other skills. Investigation, martial arts training, strategics, swordsmanship, speed. And even if that fails to be enough for them, we can still be Ennea."* Green reminded him.

"*Plus we still have access to my Quirk."* Yellow added.

Hawks knew that. He knew he should not wallow and complain because Lemillion had lost his Quirk in the other timeline and kept fighting and smiling, and Orange had lost his arm and kept fighting and smiling. Why should Hawks let himself mope? Why should he feel so tired he did not want to eat?

"*It' i called being human."* Red said with far more patience than Hawks deserved. *"You are allowed to be upset."*

Hawks couldn't think of anything he wanted to say— to agree *or* disagree with her sentiments — so he changed the subject. *Should we try to track down the League as Ennea?*

The voices noticed his blatant diversion tactics but did not comment on it.

He almost wished they would so they'd finally yell at him.

"*We can **try**."* Green said hesitantly. Hawks picked up on the reluctance in his voice.

"*I will be the one to say it."* Silver declared abruptly. *"We are all shocked that Twice and Dabi helped us."*

"*Spinner as well."* Pink reminded him.

"*Correction: they helped **Hawks**."* Yellow stated. *"Big distinction there because Hawks is one person who they decided to go 'Hey, let's rescue him' for some unknown reason. Well, technically Gold is nine people but they didn't know that. Or would it be ten people rescued since they helped Tokoyami too— Oh, I'm doing a Green."*

"*Understandable."* Green acknowledged, and Hawks sensed another incoming ramble session. *"Though is it you or are we becoming less stable since—?"*

"***Anyway,"*** Yellow interrupted loudly. *"I doubt Dabi's going to give up on vengeance and Twice and Spinner will magically reintegrate into the society that still rejects them."*

"*Which is why we're going to change things."* Purple stated. *"Right, Gold?"*

Hawks wished he could pretend that Purple was not prodding and judging his reaction. He shifted uncomfortably, stomach twisting into knots, but nodded. He wasn't about to go back on his belief that Hero Society needed to change because of his trai—… his *conditioning*, and the Commission's threats, and his lost wings, and—

We should find Twice anyway, Hawks thought before he could keep spiraling down. *For you guys.*

The voices' excitement— and unease— was undeniable. They had received flickers of some of the memories from Purple— Hawks was sure he would never forget seeing himself from outside his body— and he had filled them all in on what happened when Twice cloned Hawks. It was far from the solution they needed but it was a step in the right direction. Getting the voices out of Hawks's head was not some distant, fantastical dream anymore, one so impossible they could not bear to think about it for long. Now, getting them out might be a *possibility*.

Hawks touched his forehead with his fingertips and felt a ghost of a smile on his lips. *We're going to get you out of here. You're going to be okay.*

Green chuckled. It sounded watery. Hawks felt him suppress himself like he was trying to physically hold back tears.

Hawks's brow furrowed. *Why are you crying?*

"*Oh, you know me."* Green choked. *"I have to cry about everything."*

"*Shitty crybaby nerd."* Orange muttered.

Hawks's phone buzzed again and he saw it was a cat video from Toshinori. Accompanying it was a text asking it he was okay with visitors. Hawks wondered if he was talking about his former interns— Tokoyami had been released from the hospital long before Hawks had woken— and felt a chaotic mess of emotions he could not decipher.

They're going to see me like this anyway.

Hawks sent an okay and spent the next half hour picking at his food and pushing it around his plate. The nurse came in and glanced at his untouched meal. Hawks pointedly ignored the way she looked at him with a perfect mix of exasperation, pity, sorrow, and disappointment.

"You should eat, sweetie." she said gently as she took the plate.

Hawks looked at her and shrugged, not feeling like explaining himself. She tried to start a conversation but eventually gave up and left him alone again. It was rude of him not to talk to her but he just… couldn't find the energy. His body was lighter than it should be because of his missing wings, but somehow it felt too heavy, like it was dragging him down.

But that was unconnected to his bout of quietness. He just didn't feel like speaking out loud at the moment. That was all.

"*You can always talk to us."* Pink encouraged, but even she sounded exhausted.

Not willing to be *that* rude, Hawks sent a vague confirmation that he heard her and turned back to the window. The light outside had shifted, allowing him to see a bit of his reflection. He looked thin and tired and pale with dull eyes and unkempt hair. Heroes were supposed to be unmovable mountains but he looked like the softest breeze would make him shatter. Hawks dropped his gaze with a sigh. He really hoped it wasn't his interns coming. He did not want them to see him like this.

Someone tapped softly on his door. He looked at it and caught a glimpse of two of his latest Pro Hero guards— Fatgum and Rock Lock— before Toshinori's tall, thin frame filled the doorway. His gaunt face was paler than it had been before Hawks vanished. Hawks felt another swell of guilt. He hadn't even considered how Toshinori must have felt after Hawks stupidly called him for help. What had he been thinking, calling a civilian— a Hero Agency secretary but still a civilian— for assistance?

Did I really think All Might would save me? How stupid can I be?

Hawks did not see anyone else come in with Toshinori. He dropped his gaze back to his lap and waved in Toshinori's general direction.

"Hello, Hawks." Toshinori said. His voice sounded as warm and patient as it always did, like Hawks wasn't a screw up who made him stress out and probably blame himself for weeks.

Stop being self-pitying, you stupid bitch. It's your fault things ended like this.

"*No it's not."* Green denied sternly. *"And don't call yourself that."*

Hawks yanked himself out of his head before he could spiral into more self-pity and focused on Toshinori. And the person beside him, who had been hidden by Toshinori's much taller stature.

Principal Nedzu's tail twitched. "Greetings, Hawks. I apologize for interrupting your rest but there are urgent matters I must discuss with you."

Hawks could only be relieved that his skin could not pale any further. He opened his mouth and coughed as his dry throat constricted.

"You do not need to speak if you do not want to right now." Nedzu said smoothly.

Almost *too* smoothly, like he had predicted Hawks would act this way. It was not a soothing notion. Hawks could not help but eye the Principal of UA warily. This was his new owne— boss, after all. Nedzu climbed into one of the empty chairs while Toshinori sat in the other. The difference in their heights was almost funny but Hawks could not find the energy to laugh.

"*Be careful in how you react."* Silver cautioned. *"Nedzu is very intelligent."*

"*Huge understatement."* Yellow muttered.

Nedzu settled on the plastic hospital chair with delicate poise, paws placed serenely on his knees. "I came here to inform you that the Commission sent me your medical files. I know what Kaetsu did. *All* of it."

The last of Hawks's fragile sense of control in this situation died. He stared at Nedzu uncomprehendingly and wished the floor would open up and swallow him.

Toshinori looked away from him, covering his eyes with a large, bony hand, and Hawks's growing sense of horror doubled. Was Toshinori disgusted? Was that why he was shaking?

Hawks jerked his gaze away from him and towards the window. Jumping out of it was becoming rather appealing.

"*You don't have your wings."* Green reminded him hesitantly.

Hawks was not sure he cared. Actually, scratch that. Thinking more on it, he *did* care. If it was humiliation that drove him towards that initial bout of apathy, he might not be concerned. But it *wasn't* humiliation. Just a bone-weary exhaustion with life in general. He reminded himself that the voices needed him and clung to that notion. He needed to stop being overdramatic. He knew what the end of the world was and losing his wings wasn't it.

...*Temporarily* losing his wings wasn't it.

That was what he meant.

Nedzu delicately pressed his paws together, eyes narrowed to slits. "They seemed to be under the impression that it would discourage me to bring you onto my staff. However, I find that information irrelevant to your ability to teach."

Hawks could not believe he had heard that right. Surely Nedzu was joking. Why would he think Hawks could protect his students after his repeated failures to protect even himself?

"Why?" he whispered. His voice was low and hoarse.

Nedzu cocked his head to the side. Any cute effect that could be embellished from the move was smothered by the calculating look in his eyes. "Why what?"

Hawks swallowed roughly. "Why do you still want me?"

"Unless your loss of wings has somehow affected your ability to use your mind—"

Toshinori cleared his throat. "Nedzu, remember our earlier conversation?"

Nedzu blinked innocently at him and inclined his head. "I apologize for my uncouth comment, Hawks."

"It's fine." Hawks croaked. How he wished his voice didn't sound so awful. "Um. I'll have you know my brain cells aren't in my f-feathers. Might have lost a few from the head injuries though."

The joke might have worked if he did not sound so choked up.

Why was he like this? Why couldn't he be strong and laugh about his amputation to lift the spirits of others like Heroes were supposed to? He'd like to blame his misery on some external factor but he knew it had to be all him. The voices were so quiet behind their walls, so it wasn't like it could be them infecting him with their own grief.

Nedzu smiled slightly, just a twitch of his lips. "As I was saying, you are still an asset to UA. You were supposed to work part time to begin with but considering… recent developments, we've increased your hours."

"I saw." Hawks mumbled. "In an article."

Nedzu's nose wrinkled in distaste. "Ah yes. The lovely media is certainly full of vultures."

"Which is why we think it best that you move to UA as soon as you're released." Toshinori interjected. He smiled. "The students will be our neighbors soon as well, so there will be plenty to do."

Something about his words nagged at Hawks but he could not put his finger on what it was. "What will I need to pay for?"

"Miruko has already moved your belongings to your new apartment." Toshinori informed him. "You will only need to purchase food and the like. Everything else is covered."

"Including medical expenses." Nedzu added.

Hawks recognized that tone. It was the tone of someone who expected something from the person they were talking to. Hawks ignored the voices' insistence that Nedzu didn't because he knew he was right about this.

Nedzu proved him to be correct. "Those paid-for benefits include therapy."

Hawks wondered if he could fall any lower. He knew the answer and forced himself to remember that and be grateful for what he had. Things could always be worse.

Toshinori gritted his teeth and put his hand over his face again. "*Nedzu*."

Nedzu ignored him. "Tokoyami has already agreed to visit Hound Dog, who has offered to be there for you as well. You may want to speak with someone who is not your coworker but I encourage you to see a therapist."

He seemed friendly enough but it did not sound like a request. If Hawks said no would UA refuse to hire him? That might not be so bad if not for UA being the center of many possible world-changing events in the future. With that in mind, Hawks reluctantly nodded.

Nedzu seemed to read his thoughts. "We will not cast you out onto the street but we are not a charity."

Hawks nodded again.

Nedzu blinked at him with those beady, knowing eyes and sighed. "You are not leaving one master for another, Keigo."

There was no sensation of fluffed feathers at Hawks's back. The absence of that expected feeling slowly consumed his mind until it was almost all he could think about. He clung to the defensiveness that would have shown in his wings and let his teeth bare.

"That's not my—" Hawks remembered who he was talking to and went silent.

Nedzu's black eyes were piercing. "My mistake, Hawks." He slipped out of the chair to the floor. "Welcome to UA's staff."

Hawks watched him leave and looked to Toshinori, not sure what he wanted from the other man. Toshinori reached out and laid a warm hand on his shoulder, giving him a weak smile.

"I apologize for Nedzu's bluntness. It is simply his nature." He paused. "Well, maybe not his nature, but it is who he is."

"I don't mind." Hawks claimed. Toshinori still looked worried so Hawks managed a smile for his sake. "Really, I'm okay. I'm going to need thick skin."

Toshinori shook his head minutely. "You shouldn't have to." He rose from his chair and nodded towards Hawks's phone. "I expect you to watch those baby animal videos I sent you." he ordered with mock sternness.

Hawks's smile became more natural and he feigned a salute. "Mission accepted."

Toshinori's chuckle made the tightness in Hawks's chest ease, as it often did. This time, it failed to make all his bad thoughts go away. Hawks waited for Toshinori to leave before wiping hastily at his eyes as he turned inward.

Are you sure you're okay?

"*We're fine."* Green claimed. *"We're just…"* He faltered, almost as if he had been intending to say something only to stop at the last second. *"...sorry. For everything."*

It's not your fault, Hawks reminded them again. *I'm the one who blocked you in and made us end up like this.*

"*You're a real hypocrite for blaming yourself while not letting us blame ourselves."* Orange muttered. There was no denying the tinge of sadness buried under his frustrated growl.

Maybe. But what else is new?

The voices murmured their agreement and crowded around him, enveloping him with vague whispers of support and optimism and strength. Despite their efforts, Hawks could feel the hints of unease, sorrow, and guilt plaguing them and forced himself to not respond with his own.

He knew he screwed up.

He knew he was the reason they were more helpless than when they started out.

But they still had a chance to fix things.

Thanks to UA, they still had their freedom.

They could still save the world.

XXXXXXX

It was as if a tornado had gone straight through UA's supposedly impenetrable halls. Walls were cracked and crumbling, windows were shattered with glass strewn across the floor, and most of the furniture was overturned and covered with a layer of dust. The lights above them flickered and Midoriya winced at every period of darkness, holding his breath until he could see his hands again.

The eight time travelers sat on or around the couch in the main area, watching dust and crushed mortar trickle from the ceiling. Yel— Kaminari nudged a chunk of concrete with his foot and swore as it crumbled away and another crack split the flooring.

"I can fix it!" he said hastily and began trying to do exactly that.

But it seemed that no matter how hard he tried, the cracks did not fade. The walls kept crumbling, the lights flickered and sparked, and dust trickled from the creaking ceiling.

Midoriya watched Kaminari struggle for a while before he forced his sight away.

"When are we going to tell him?"

It was Uraraka who voiced the question they were all thinking but did not want to say. She looked to Midoriya— they all did— and the weight of being their leader had never felt so burdensome before.

"Soon." Midoriya said vaguely.

Her brown eyes hardened. "*When*?"

"*Soon*." Midoriya repeated.

"We should tell him now." Todoroki stated.

"No, we shouldn't." Purple— Crap, he meant *Shinso*— said, siding with Midoriya. "We can't —"

"Got it!" Yello— *Kaminari* whooped as the crack he had been working on vanished. He grinned at them and gave a double thumbs up before grasping Yaoyorozu's hand and pulling her towards a window. "We can fix this part next."

Midoriya continued to observe as they worked on the next crack, wishing he could feel Kaminari's optimism. But the fact was he was placing band aids over stab wounds. Healing the damage done to their conjured UA might help a tiny bit but it would not heal what was truly wrong.

"We can't tell Hawks now." Shinso continued. "You all feel how close he is to giving up."

Midoriya shuddered as he recalled the hollow despair that had gripped Hawks, so potent and numbing that the time travelers had genuinely feared he might go to the window and let himself fall. Despite those paranoid, condescending, and rather insensitive thoughts— for

Hawks would never bring them to harm like that— he was not so depressed that he would go to such measures. And not just because the eight of them were there. But Midoriya knew Hawks was clinging to the edge of a cliff by his fingertips, grasping any reason he had to keep fighting as desperately as he clung to the figurative stone.

"I agree with Gre— Midoriya and Shinso." Iida stated. He pushed his cracked glasses up his nose and grimaced. "We are not his only motivation to keep fighting, but we are an undeniable factor. He needs to be in a healthier place before we cause more upheaval."

"So we're going to wait until he has some stability to ruin it again?" Bakugo demanded.

He tried to cross his arm, only to balk as he failed to move his nonexistent left one. He recovered quickly enough to glower at them as though daring them to say anything. None of them did.

"We don't have a choice—" Midoriya began.

"There is always a choice." Uraraka said lowly.

Midoriya did his best not to flinch. A huge crack appeared in the ceiling and green smoke trickled from it like it led to Hell itself. Kaminari groaned.

"Sorry." Midoriya muttered.

Kaminari waved dismissively. "It can't be helped."

Red— *Yaoyorozu* looked from him to the crack before meeting Midoriya's eyes. "Should we vote?"

That was probably a bad idea considering how conflicted they already were. At least Hawks seemed to be blaming himself for how miserable and distraught he was. That was not really a good thing but to Midoriya, it was preferable to the alternative of Hawks realizing it was the *voices'* overwhelming grief he felt.

"Okay. Who thinks we should wait to tell Hawks?"

Midoriya raised his hand. So did Shinso, Iida, and surprisingly Bakugo. When Midoriya gave him a questioning look, he glared at the wall and refused to say anything. That was four votes, with only eight people available. Great.

"Who wants to tell Hawks now?" Midoriya asked out of necessity.

Kaminari, Todoroki, and Uraraka raised their hands.

Yaoyorozu's expression twisted but she did not move.

"Momo?" Uraraka questioned.

"I… I know he will find out eventually but..." She pressed her hands over her mouth as her eyes filled with tears. "I'm sorry. I don't think we should inform Hawks yet. He is already

overwhelmed. This will only hurt him more."

A chunk of the ceiling crashed down beside her as Kaminari glowered.

"Oh, I'm sure it will." he snarled. The lights flickered and in the darkness, his yellow eyes almost seemed to glow. "So let's drop this on Gold *later* when we're all about to—"

Red smoke swirled into the room and more cracks appeared in the floor and ceiling, undoing most of the repairs Yaoyorozu and Kaminari had done. Kaminari instantly deflated. He walked over to Yaoyorozu and put an arm around her shoulder in a show of support.

"I understand." Kaminari looked away and Midoriya did not miss the grimace that flashed across his features. "Fine. So we won't say anything yet. Maybe… things will fix themselves before we have to tell him?"

"Maybe." Midoriya echoed. He highly doubted it. "But even if it doesn't…

He raised his hand in front of his face, taking in every bump and scar that marred his skin. Each mark had its own story, some that many knew, some that only he knew, and some that he hoped would never come to pass.

He clenched his fist and watched it flicker in and out of existence.

"We still have time left. We can still save the world."

Chapter End Notes

Here we are, at the end of book one. As always at the end of a book, the answers to Frequently Asked Questions will be in the comments below.

The next book will be called "For Our Sakes".

Summary: *They went back in time to save the future, but doing it is much more complicated than they thought. With the Commission seeking to kill Hawks and crush any who want to change Hero Society, All For One lurking in the shadows as he plans to make his next move, and Miruko starting her mission, enemies surround them on all sides. But there might just be allies there, too...*

The first chapter of "For Our Sakes" will be uploaded in one month between the 29th and 30th-ish.

See you there.

Edit: This story has gotten more fan art! See it here. Thank you Guardianspirits13!!!! It's amazing!!!!!

Works inspired by this one

[Podfic] For Their Sakes by crispybasementghost

falling backwards // broken mirror by orkestrations

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!